

**PUSHED TO THE PERIPHERY:
THE NECESSITY OF WOMEN'S INNOVATION IN
ACTIVATING POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION**



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Isis WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL CROSS CULTURAL EXCHANGE

We Link Women Internationally

Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE)

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ACRONYMS

AFELL	Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia
AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
ANC	Antenatal Care
APRODH	Association for Human Rights Protection and Defense
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CORDAID	Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
FAS	Femmes Afrique Solidarite
FSUs	Family Support Units
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GBV-PoA	Gender Based Violence – Plan of Action
GNWP	Global Network of Women Peace Builders
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HIV&AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICGLR	International Conference on the Great Lakes Region
IDP	Internally Displaced People
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGOs	International Non Governmental Organisations

IRC	International Rescue Committee
Isis-WICCE	Isis-Women's International Cross Cultural Exchange
LDHS	Liberia Demographic Health Survey
LNP	Liberia National Police
LWI	Liberian Women Initiative
MARWOPNET	Mano River's Women's Peace Network
MDRP	Multi-Country Demobilisation and Re-integration Program
MoGD	Ministry of Gender and Development
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
MSWGCA	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NAP	National Action Plan
NCOs	Non Commissioned Officers
NEC	National Elections Commission
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NOW-SL	National Organisation for Women - Sierra Leone
NSSRL	National Security Strategy of the Republic of Liberia
NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
NTLA	National Transitional Legislative Assembly
PEP	Post Exposure Prophylaxis
PSU	Police Support Unit
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
ROL	Republic of Liberia
RVF	Recto Vaginal Fistula
SCSL	Special Court of Sierra Leone
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

SGBV	Sexual Gender Based Violence
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SOPs	Standard Operating Procedures
SSIs	Security Sector Institutions
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Entity for Women's Empowerment
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNPF	United Nations Population Fund
UNSCR	United National Security Council Resolution
USA	United States of America
VAW	Violence Against Women
VVF	Vesico Vaginal Fistula
WACPS	Women and Children Protection Service
WANEP	West Africa Peace building Network
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defenders
WIPNET	Women in Peace building Network
WCC	World Council of Churches
WIPNET	Women in Peace Building Network
WHO	World Health Organisation
WONGOSOL	Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia
WYWCA	World Young Women's Christian Association

1.1 Introduction

This report provides an analysis of the extent to which post conflict reconstruction efforts have implemented national commitments for women's participation in conflict management, post-conflict reconstruction, and rehabilitation processes, as provided for in United Nations Resolution 1325. The study focused on three countries - Burundi, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Each country has experienced decades of armed conflict with severe consequences including mass displacement, extreme forms of violence such as rape of women, forced conscription of children into militia groups, and the maiming of civilian populations. According to Isis-WICCE (2008), in Liberia, 62.5% of women reported a personal experience of sexual torture and 80% suffered at least one form of psychological torture. In Sierra Leone, over a million people were internally displaced while another 450,000 sought refuge in neighbouring Liberia and Guinea, and 50,000 lost their lives.¹ It is also documented that 100,000 people were mutilated and over a quarter of a million women raped.² In Burundi, it is estimated that 300,000 people were killed.³ Between 2004 and 2006, the MSF Seruka Centre reported 4,039 cases.⁴

62.5 percent of women in Liberia, reported a personal experience of sexual torture and 80 percent suffered at least one form of psychological torture.

1 Frank ImHoff (Sep. 1999). Sierra Leone: Living with traumatic effects of civil war. <http://archive.wfn.org/1999/09/msg.00185.html>. Downloaded on 20th April 2013.

2 UNICEF, 2004. The Impact of conflict on women and girls in West and Central Africa and the UNICEF response.

3 Agbalajobi, D. T. (2009). The Role of African Women in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution: The Case of Burundi. African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, 12(1-2)

4 Amnesty International (2007). Burundi: No protection from rape in war and peace.

Despite the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, the African Union (AU) Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, and national level commitments on ensuring women's participation in peace building, feminist literature about war and peace⁵ has seemingly made little impact as yet on the discussion of empirical research taking place in a predominantly male mainstream of political science, security discourse and peace building practice.⁶ Olonisakin and Okech's edited book on "Women and Security Governance in Africa" (2011) states that peacebuilding efforts in Africa have struggled to take women's lived realities of peace and (in) security into account.⁷ Research has shown that women's complex experiences of war and post conflict reconstruction efforts continue to be on the margins of government-led peace and security processes.⁸

5 Feminist political scientists began to critique neo-realist interpretations of peace and security in the early 1990's. See, for example: Ann J. Tickner, 'Hans Morgenthau's Principles of Political Realism: a Feminist Reformulation', in Grant, Rebecca, and Kathleen Newland (eds.), *Gender and International Relations* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press), pp 27-40; Jill Steans, *Gender and International Relations: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998; Sandra Whiteworth, *Feminism and International Relations*, New York: St Martins Press, 1994.

6 Joshua S. Goldstein, *War and Gender* (Cape Town: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p23. For information about African efforts to implement 1325 see Thelma Ekiyo and L. Muthoni Wanyeki, *National Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) in Africa: Needs assessment and Plan for Action* (New York: United Nations, 2008); Thelma Ekyior, "Engendering Peace: How the Peacebuilding Commission can live up to the UN Security Council Resolution 1325", FES Briefing Papers, 2006, available at <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/global/50420.pdf>. For full text of UNSCR 1325 visit United Nations website, http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf, accessed on 25 February 2013.

7 Funmi Olonisakin and Awino Okech (eds.), *Women and Security Governance in Africa*, Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011.

8 This is reflected in UN peace process - out of 21 major peace processes held since 1992, only 2.4 per cent of signatories were women. Furthermore, no women have been appointed Chief or lead peace mediators in UN-sponsored peace talks, even though some women have joined African Union mediation teams -Graca Machel was one of three mediators in the AU team during the Kenyan crisis in 2008. (Facts and Figures on Peace and Security', UN WOMEN website, http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_war_peace/facts_figures.htm http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_war_peace/facts_figures.html, accessed on 25th February 2013

The research took a feminist stance that assumes that women's lives offer 'situated knowledges' of gendered meanings of post-conflict reconstruction efforts. This perspective draws on feminist standpoint theory⁹ that proposes that knowledge can be generated from experiences of struggle against patriarchal social systems. Based on semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions with women's activists, the research considered diverse expressions of femininity that speak to notions of 'peace' in terms of local women's groups contribution to post-conflict reconstruction efforts as well as their resistance to patriarchal interpretations of 'post-conflict reconstruction'.¹⁰ Reference to government reports, relevant policy documents and interviews with key government officials offered an opportunity to 'check' whether women's peace initiatives have indeed been taken into account in government led 'post-conflict reconstruction' efforts. This report is a follow-up to a monograph published in 2005 in which Isis-WICCE documented four unique peace initiatives carried out by women who worked in Burundi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Mozambique:¹¹

The Women's Peace Centre in Burundi tactfully focused on the reconciliation of the Hutus and Tutsis and promoted peaceful co-existence by bringing communities together that had suffered high levels of distrust arising from the conflict.

9 Sandra Harding (ed.), *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.

10 A feminist analysis of peace often seeks to question and re-cast terms such as 'post war' or 'post conflict'. An examination of contexts that are referred to as 'post conflict' has revealed that women's lives continue to experience extreme violence and a re-enforcement of patriarchal systems that existed prior to the war. For example, Isis WICCE's research (2001, 2007, 2008) has found that situations of 'post conflict' or 'post war' could actually signify a return to or continuation of historically engrained patriarchal social, economic and political patriarchal systems. Meintes et.al's book titled "The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation" (2001) also revealed that in the aftermath of war, women were still exposed to abuse and violence at home (a condition that existed prior to the war as well).

11 Isis-WICCE, *Nurturers of Life: Sustainers of Africa: Selected Women's Peace Initiatives*, 2005.

Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET) through its mass action for peace approach and peace vigils contributed to the ceasefire in Liberia. The commitment that women showed by sitting out in the airfield and at the peace talks in Accra demonstrated women's resilience and innovativeness.

The Mano River's Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) is a high level sub-regional peace initiative which promoted capacity and peace building and empowerment. The organization had cross regional support since the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea had spill-over effects. The initiative focused on engaging higher level officials to achieve peace.

Since 2005, each country has developed National Action Plans for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325 – Burundi in 2011, Sierra Leone in 2010, and Liberia in 2009. Other policies have also been put in place such as National Gender-based violence plan of action (GBV-PoA) in Liberia (2006 and reviewed in 2011) that sought to provide appropriate care and services for survivors and reduce GBV by 30% by 2011; in 2009, Burundi changed its Criminal Code so that perpetrators of sexual violence can be sentenced to life imprisonment with no possibility of amnesty; in 2007, Sierra Leone enacted three laws that directly related to sexual violence experienced by women during the war – the Domestic Violence Act, for example provides for free medical examination, treatment and certificate for survivors of domestic violence. This reports reveals a selection of perspectives on the extent to which these political shifts might have positively affected women's lives in each country.

1.2 Methodology

The study was conducted in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Burundi. It was based on a qualitative research design that used focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with women activists and key government officials in the three countries. A qualitative methodology enabled the study to pay attention to various meanings that women activists have in relation to their experiences of 'post conflict reconstruction' efforts that may have been considered unimportant to government officials. Focus group discussions were especially useful in this regard because they uncovered themes and/or interpretations that would not ordinarily emerge in in-depth interviews with individual informants (Corbetta, 2003: 276). Focus group discussions offered the possibility for disruption of dominant patriarchal knowledges, especially in relation to ideas about 'post conflict reconstruction' and 'peace'. This was enhanced by reviewing relevant government reports and policy documents.

Sampling and data collection

The study took a multi-phased approach. The first phase was conducted in 2008 and the second phase in 2013. This offered a longitudinal perspective to each country context. The sampling of respondents was purposeful and based on guidance from Isis-WICCE's in-country partners. Women activists, technical staff in government ministries and departments and non- governmental organizations, representatives from media houses, and female and male survivors were sampled in the identified study areas. Participants were well informed about the background, objectives and expected outputs of the study. Consent was sought from all the participants to use their input in this report.

- Liberia:** Planning sessions were held with Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET) including other civil society organizations from 20 – 21st June 2008. This was followed with data collection from 9th to 22nd July 2008, and 10th – 15th February 2013 in Monteserrado and Bong Counties. Nine focus group discussions (110 women), 11 key informant interviews, and 8 in-depth interviews were held.
- Burundi:** Planning meetings were held with the Women’s Peace Centre in July and August 2008. The data collection was conducted from 11th to 20th September 2008 ; and 25th February to 1st March 2013 in the 3 provinces of Bujumbura, Bubanza and Ngozi. Respondents included 4 focus groups (51 women) and 25 key informants (21 female and 4 male).
- Sierra Leone:** In Sierra Leone, Isis-WICCE conducted the data Collection with the Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET) from 10th – 22nd December 2008; and from 16th - 21st February 2013 in Makeni, Tambaka and Freetown. Four focus group discussions (34 women) and 20 key informants (15 women and 5 men) were conducted.

1.3 Institutional Positionality - Isis-WICCE’s History in the Study Areas

The research focus and methodology was influenced by Isis-WICCE’s history of work in each country. Isis-WICCE’s takes cognizance of its institutional history in each country and the relevance of this in shaping interactions between research participants. Cockburn (2010: 141) states that “A stronger version of objectivity could be achieved by combining the view from below

with enquiry that was reflexive, by researchers who named and clearly situated themselves, coming clean about power, interests and values, as informative about the subject and source of knowledge as about the studied objects.” Isis-WICCE’s institutional history of work in each country reveals its ‘situatedness’ in relation to the research process. This shaped its interaction with relevant institutions and opened researchers to ‘new’ information, pertinent people in civil society and government institutions, and relevant documents.

Burundi: Isis- WICCE’s work in Burundi dates as far as 2001 when she rolled out her 5 year training for women leaders entitled “Women Building Peace and Good Neighbourliness in the Great Lakes Region: from grassroots to government”. In 2002, the training was co-hosted by Search for Common Ground in Bujumbura, Burundi. This space enabled women to share experiences and their contributions to peace initiatives within the Great Lakes region and exposed women leaders to the realities of the destruction of conflict in Burundi. Since then, Burundian women have continued to be a part of Isis-WICCE’s Annual Leadership Institute. The trained women added their voice to the campaign against trafficking of girls through provision of statistics on the gravity of the issues and sensitization in selected schools. Today, the government of Burundi has made clear progress in addressing trafficking. In 2009, a Burundi court heard a case involving child domestic servitude, the first known case involving elements of a human trafficking offense.

This space enabled women to share experiences and their contributions to peace initiatives within the Great Lakes region and exposed women leaders to the realities of the destruction of conflict in Burundi.

In 2005, Isis-WICCE worked with Search for Common Ground to document the Women’s Peace Centre’s non violent peace methodologies of building peace in communities (Isis-WICCE, 2005).

To date, through the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) civil society network, Isis-WICCE and the Women's Peace Centre have continued to push for SGBV to be addressed by ICGLR.

Liberia : Isis-WICCE's work in Liberia dates back to 2000 when she joined the World Young Women's Christian Association (WYWCA) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) on a solidarity visit to the Liberian women. This visit inspired Isis-WICCE to document the mass action for peace initiative of Liberian Women (Isis-WICCE, 2005). Having identified the need to further strengthen the leadership capacity of women to prepare them for active engagement in post conflict reconstruction, Isis-WICCE organized the 2007-8 International Exchange Programme Institute in Liberia that enabled Liberian women to join other women across the globe to acquire more skills in conflict resolution, documentation and regional and international human rights mechanisms, among others. This was followed by a research in 2008 "A situation analysis of women survivors of the 1989-2003 Armed conflict in Liberia" (Isis-WICCE, 2008) that brought to the surface women's untold stories on how their sexuality was targeted, their resilience and how they were continuing to struggle in the post conflict era with no responsive programmes to address their specific needs. In 2009, Isis-WICCE partnered with the Women in Peace Building Network, the Ministries of Health and Gender, and organized a short term medical intervention in Bong and Maryland counties that enabled women and men survivors to access quality health care.

In 2004, in conjunction with MARWOPNET, documented the women's approaches in brokering peace and restoring peace in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone: Isis-WICCE has provided space to Sierra Leonean women to be apart of the Isis-WICCE annual Leadership Institute since 2004 to date. In 2004, in conjunction with MARWOPNET, documented the

women's approaches in brokering peace and restoring peace in Sierra Leone. The outcome of the documentation facilitated the mutual cooperation with Femmes Afrique Solidarite (FAS)¹² through the Gender is my Agenda Campaign where advocacy campaigns are held during the Annual Heads of State summits. Using this platform, Isis-WICCE in collaboration with FAS lobbied the Security Council and were granted space that enabled survivors of sexual and gender based violence to address the security council for the first time in the history of the council. This subsequently resulted in the Security Council committing to mainstream gender in peace missions of the African Union.

Analysis – extracting themes

This long period of interaction with research participants offered the research process a wealth of information that may not all be articulated and 'offered' as findings in this report. It was a challenge to pay attention "...to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes."¹³ Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. This is "...a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail". This assisted in revealing embedded themes that relate to 'gendered' meanings of 'peace' and 'post conflict reconstruction'. A "theme" was understood as something important about the data that related to the objective of the research and represents some level of patterned response or meaning with the data set (Bruan and Clarke, 2006: 10).

12 A regional network that has taken leadership at the African Union to advocate for Gender equality and gender mainstreaming in all African Union mechanisms.

13 Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 2002. "Under Western Eyes'Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles", Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 28: 2, p. 501.

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BURUNDI

2.1 Patriarchy and Militarism – a Historical Glance

Burundi's postcolonial experience has been punctuated with political turbulence and ethnic strife, the magnitude of which has affected all Burundians (Alusala, 2005: 1), resulting in unprecedented human rights violations. Violent conflict in Burundi can be grouped into two main periods: the colonial period and the post colonial period. The colonial period involved changes that occurred among Bangwana, Bahutu, and Batutsi. The post colonial period included the eve of independence and transitional disorder; the 1972 genocide; the 1988 ethnic tensions; and the violence and uncertainty that followed the 1993 multi party democratization initiatives. Burundi has experienced an unstable postcolonial statehood that has been impacted by complex politics of surrounding countries that form part of the Great Lakes regional (in) security. Post colonial conflicts were along political, economic and social lines with genocidal, criminal and terrorist aspects.

The causes of internal violence are varied and many. These include colonial residual effects and burden of inheritance; the construction of political landscape through racial patriarchal lenses; and colonial policies that embedded patriarchal ethnic divisions (Jeng, 2010). The state evolved into a kind of militarism that emphasized certain ethnicised masculinities (Hutu vs Tutsi) that were dependent on male power and dominance over society. This created a situation where hierarchies of ethnicised femininities and masculinities became part of Burundian nationhood. Along the lines of Jones (2000: 186-7) notion of 'gendercide', mass killings and violence was informed by rigid ethnicised gendered interpretations of the 'enemy'. For example, combatant and non-combatant men who were labeled either Hutu or Tutsi (depending

“The state evolved into a kind of militarism that emphasized certain ethnicised masculinities (Hutu vs Tutsi) that were dependent on male power and dominance over society.”

which stage of Burundi's history being referred to) were the most frequent targets of mass killing and genocidal slaughter. In contrast, women were targeted (often in the form of mass killing as well as rape and/or forced marriage) because their bodies were perceived as being symbolic of either Hutu or Tutsi sexual prowess that required elimination, control or restriction. This kind of analysis of Burundi's history of war resonates with Amina Mama and Okazawa-Rey's (2012: 99) idea of militarism as an extreme variant of patriarchy that plays out in the form of "...a gendered regime characterised by discourses and practices that subordinate and oppress women, as well as non-dominant men, reinforcing hierarchies of class, gender, race and ethnicity, and in some contexts caste, religion and location."

Historical accounts of Burundi's colonial period point to an increased reliance on masculine interpretations of rigid ethnic identities that were initially (prior to German and Belgium colonial encroachment) quite fluid. Whereas there is contestation (among scholars such as Newbury, 1998; Lemarchand, 1970; Mamdani, 2001) about the origins of 'Hutu'/'Tutsi' ethnic categories and the degree of social mobility and oppression between them, what is clear is that the stereotype of male 'Tutsi' being a distinguishable group that are more skilled in matters of the state became more prevalent during the colonial period. According to Linden (1977:4) "...what had once been a fluid ethnic boundary between two socio-economic groups hardened under Belgian rule into an unchangeable barrier between categories of Hutu and Tutsi defining access to the political class." The public sphere of the colonial state was closed to all 'African' women regardless of ethnicity. Belgium missionaries even trained wives of evolue (chiefs selected by colonial state) in housekeeping, child rearing and sewing in an attempt to instill patriarchal European values of the importance women's role in the 'private' sphere of a 'nuclear' family.

"...what is clear is that the stereotype of male 'Tutsi' being a distinguishable group that are more skilled in matters of the state became more prevalent during the colonial period."

Rigid ethnicised femininities were also coined alongside this. According to O’Daley (2007: 52) “...Tutsi women were said to be tall, slender, light-skinned and the epitome of beauty.” This stereotypical superiority of ‘Tutsi’ femininities based on western notions of beauty and sexual imagery was a ‘doubtless powerful motivation for certain atrocities experienced by women against each other’ (O’ Daley, 2007: 53). Another colonial myth was that Hutu men could marry Tutsi women, but Tutsi men ought not marry Hutu women for fear of being perceived lower down in ethnic masculine hierarchy (Daley, 2007: 53). This colonial patriarchal ethnicised hierarchy was reinforced with the creation of customary law that led to further subordination of women and enabled men to further extend their authority over women classified as ‘Tutsi’ or ‘Hutu’. These laws continue to exist in Burundi’s legal system. This report considers the extent to which ‘post-conflict’ policies seek to change these colonial remnants of patriarchal laws and administrative practices.

It is worth noting here that even though literature on histories of femininities in Burundi is sparse, Burundian women did enjoy some authority in the form of control over cows, land and other forms of wealth (Albert, 1971: 180). “A woman was revered for using feminine guile to advance herself. This enabled Burundi women to accrue wealth independent of their husbands. Intelligent and wealthy women were Bashingantahe” (O’ Daley, 2007: 54). Women of wealth gained a position of honour upon which they received cows, clothing, jewellery and serfs, all of which were considered her own, and not the property of her husband. In addition, Burundi has a history of Queen-mothers. One of whom was known as RIRIKUMUTIMA who governed the country for a long time during the precolonial period. Other matriarchs could have existed either in contestation with or along side patriarchy. Colonialism subverted these spaces of power women occupied and created a patriarchal alliance between colonial Belgium/German male officials and newly socially constructed ‘Burundian’ male elite.

A further entrenchment of ethnic elite masculinities occurred when Belgium and German colonial systems established centralized military forces that were considered vital for the security of the colonial establishment. Men from certain ethnic groups or regions were considered either to belong to a 'martial race' or were the right sort of outsiders needed to dispense justice. From 1916 to 1923, for example, Burundi was run by the Belgian military (la Force Publique) that consisted of Congolese soldiers. Subsequent militaries such as the Garde Nationale Burundaise that was formed in 1960 included men classified as 'Hutu' and 'Tutsi' (O'Daley, 2007: 58-59). The various military forces created centralized institutionalized violence that was born out of a combination of German/Belgium versions of military force and local armies. The colonial state thus created a militarized ethnically defined male elite that led to the creation of a militarized patriarchal colonial state system, remnants of which contributed to genocidal atrocities after independence.

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A series of military and non-democratic regimes ruled Burundi after Independence in 1962. Fear of growth in each ethnic groups political influence lead to the assassination of Burundi's first democratically elected and first Hutu President, Melchior Ndadaye. After just four months in office, widespread ethnic violence ensued and lasted more than a decade. Around 300,000 people died in the fighting, which also sparked an unprecedented refugee and internally displaced people (IDP) crisis. As the conflict raged internally, fighting also spilled over into neighbouring countries – Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania and Uganda.¹⁴

¹⁴ Burundi Conflict profile, available at <http://www.insightsonconflict.org/conflicts/burundi/conflict-profile/> accessed March 20, 2013

2.2 Post Conflict Reconstruction – a Window for Feminist Shifts?

The Arusha Agreement of 2000 set in motion a peace process that led to a new constitution approved on 18 March 2005 that led to the 2005 elections that installed the new President and government (Parliament, Communal councils, and hillside [colline] councils). The new government inherited an economy characterized by endemic poverty, overwhelming debt, widespread corruption, diminished soil productivity and other environmental problems, and degraded public sector institutions. It also inherited, however, a strong consensus for the first time in post-independence Burundi in favor of peace, ethnic reconciliation, and good governance, and the restoration of security throughout the country (USAID, 2006).

The Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement of 28 August 2000 stipulates that the promotion of equality between men and women is a matter of human rights and constitutes a condition for social justice, which is an essential means to building a sustainable, just and developed society. It also states that the empowerment of women is a prerequisite for political, social, economic, cultural and ecological security of all the components of the populations. Protocol IV of the Arusha Agreement specifies the principles of equity and nondiscrimination that should govern the process of repatriation. Furthermore, the 2005 Constitution of Burundi emphasizes the principle of rights, equality and nondiscrimination

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30 percent quota for women in political leadership is provided for in the constitution.”

among all Burundians due to the inclusion of all international human rights instruments.¹⁵ The constitution also provides for a 30% quota for women in political leadership. Two election cycles (2005 and 2010) have followed this guideline.

Most of the duties are reflected in the Constitution of Burundi, for example Article 13 stipulates that all Burundians are equal in value and dignity and are entitled to equal protection of the law, and equal treatment under the law. It further states that ‘no one may be discriminated against, inter alia, on the grounds of origin, race, ethnicity, gender, colour, social situation, religious philosophical or political convictions, or by reason of a physical or mental handicap or infection with HIV/AIDS virus or any other disease’.¹⁶ Despite the progress made so far, the area of inheritance is governed by discriminatory practices against women since customary law (inherited from colonial legal system) gives privileges to men.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (passed in October 2000) on women, peace and security calls for “increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional, and international institutions and mechanisms for the

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“In April 2000, Burundian women went beyond ethnic divisions to articulate common demands on specific provisions of the Peace Accord...”

15 Burundi has signed and ratified the following international humanitarian laws; the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenants on Human Rights, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. All these were referred to in the constitution.

16 For online version of constitution see <http://www.chanrobles.com/burundi1.html>, accessed on 14 June 2013.

prevention, management, and resolution of conflict.” At that time Burundi was experiencing a very crucial period in its history with the Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation. “In April 2000, Burundian women went beyond ethnic divisions to articulate common demands on specific provisions of the Peace Accord...” (WAP and Fontaine-ISOKO, 2011). There was a call for women to be allowed increased representation in all political decision making positions. In response, in December 2003, the Government of Burundi adopted the National Gender Policy. This policy has not been implemented due to non-gender sensitive national budget.

A broad policy framework was provided by the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP-I), which was developed in 2003 while the conflict was still raging, the government was a transitional one, and consultations had to be limited to areas where security could be guaranteed. Nevertheless, this was the first time such consultations did take place in Burundi and constituted the initial step towards an eventual systematic process of government-civil society interaction. The I-PRSP consultations identified a long catalogue of areas and associated reforms and actions. However, with some exceptions, indications of the relative importance of sequencing of their implementation were missing. It was clear that most of the reforms were inherently long-term, complex, and dependent on steady and capable management (USAID, 2006).

The PRSP-I priority areas of actions included: Peace and good governance; Macroeconomic stability and economic growth; Basic social services; Reintegrating war victims and disadvantaged groups; Combating HIV/AIDS/STDs; and women in development. It is important to note that one of the priority areas of the I-PRSP is women empowerment through women in development programs. The government of Burundi therefore sees the value of ensuring that women play significant roles in the post conflict recovery of the country. During the period the country

developed the Multi-Country Demobilization and reintegration Program (MDRP)¹⁷ aimed at demobilizing, reinstating and reintegrating ex-combatants and members of the former armed forces into the country's defense and security forces. A second PRSP (referred to as PRSP-II) was developed in 2012. Both documents highlight the long term vision of development, as well as the strategic themes for promoting sound economic growth and reducing poverty.

In 2007, the development of a National Action Plan (NAP) on SCR 1325 began on the initiative of a Steering Committee composed of representatives of government ministries, civil society and UN agencies. On 13 December 2011, the government adopted the National Action Plan (NAP) on the implementation of UNSCR 1325. In line with UNSCR 1325, regional agreements and declarations on sexual violence have been adopted such as the International Conference on Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) Protocol on the Prevention and Suppression of Sexual Violence against Women and Children and the Goma Declaration (2006). Weaknesses in the implementation of the Great lakes Protocol, led to the development and adoption of the ICGLR Declaration on Sexual and Gender Based Violence in December 2011. The declaration was signed by all the governments of the Great Lakes Region, including Burundi.

In addition to the PRSP-I, the government's 'Vision 2025' was formulated. The objectives of the Vision 2025 are to reconstruct national unity and a nation that experiences security and that is at peace; control population growth and ensure food security; resolve the crucial problem of unemployment and increase household incomes; diversify and promote a competitive economy on a sound basis; and implement infrastructures for supporting production; and increase the level of literacy and create competent professionals. Gender is included as a 'cross cutting' issue. There is acknowledgement of the achievements made in increasing women's representation in

17 In French it is referred to as "Programme National de Demobilisation, Rehabilitation et Reintegration" (PNDRR).

political spaces. There is also recognition of existing disparities in uplifting the overall socio-economic and political status of women in Burundian society. Vision 2025 commits to setting up a proactive policy for the promotion of women especially through the improvement of their access to education and ensuring the significant increase in the participation of women in the economic development of the country.

The government of Burundi has put in place various laws to address sexual and gender based violence; however these laws have not been fully implemented. The criminal code, promulgated on 22 April 2009 provides a series of improvements in terms of protection of women and girls from violence and extended criminal charges against perpetrators of sexual violence up to life imprisonment, it also describes the charges as fixed, which means amnesty cannot be granted and penalties must be imposed even if a long time has passed between the crime and the prosecution (art 559). General Status of Civil Servants (2006) Act no 1/28; article 55 puts maternity leave at 14 weeks (increase of two weeks from the former 12 weeks); and two hours per day during six months of the breastfeeding period for women. The labour code protects a pregnant woman against unfair dismissal due to pregnancy. Decree no 100/136 of 16 June 2006 provided for health care subsidies to children under five years, and free maternal services for women. Despite these commitments, sexual and gender based violence has continued to occur post the Arusha agreement.

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Decree no 100/136 of 16 June 2006 provided for health care subsidies to children under five years, and free maternal services for women.

In the aftermath of the conflict, the Government initially focused on the reintegration of more than 500,000 returning refugees, the majority of these were women and children. It then developed a socio-economic reintegration strategy and set up a working group to implement durable solutions for the 100,000 internally displaced people who, as of 2005, were still living in settlements the Government had established for them during the war. As noted by Seckinelgin et al (2011: 73), the DDR process in Burundi was 'framed through male paradigms' that ignored women's constant insecurity within the social relations created by the conflict. The DDR process that tried to bring the men under arms back to the community did not focus on women. The way people were selected to go through the process left a lot of women outside the system. Many women combatants who self-demobilised, who were members of militia such as the Peace Guardians, militant fighters and those who were part of street gangs, were excluded from the process. Many others who were in the rebellion were not fighting but used as support personnel linking rebels with the communities. These women were not targeted or included under the category of formal ex-combatants; they are simply ignored. Here, an important aspect is the way commanding officers were providing lists of people for cantonment in demobilisation camps.

There are women who were not listed by their commanders: they sent women back directly to their area of origin under the pretext they may be pregnant thus needed to rest at home. In this way, many 'bush wives' were reportedly prevented from receiving DDR benefits. This meant that women's problems associated with the nature of the conflict remained outside the system. Arguably, the post-conflict environment not only ignored the problems (especially sexual violence) in women's lives during the conflict and the associated needs created by them, but also created a new set of problems for women which are exacerbating their vulnerabilities to HIV.

2.3 Gendering Post Conflict Recovery – Possible Gains for Women?

Evidence abounds of the efforts of Burundian women to restore peace after a long period of war. Documentation carried out by Isis-WICCE¹⁸ shows that African women, including women of Burundi carried out innovative peace building activities that contributed to stability in their countries. Discussions with women peace activists, women human rights defenders and women politicians reveal that the peace building knowledge and skills of women have not been fully utilized in the development and implementation of post conflict reconstruction policies and programs, thus missing women's unique contribution to consolidating peace.

With regard to post conflict reconstruction decision-making, it was observed that women participated in developing the priority areas of interventions for the recovery of Burundi. However, interviews with women reveal that the government has the final say on the key priority areas of intervention. In most cases, the government's decision was in line with the expectations of the Bretton Woods Institutions such as the IMF who are the main funders of post conflict reconstruction efforts in Burundi. At the level of implementation of project areas, only government has the mandate to implement the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), civil society organizations and women's groups are not seen as capable implementers of some

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18 Isis-WICCE, 'Nurturers of Peace, Sustainers of Life' Isis-WICCE, Kampala, Uganda, 2005.

activities. The government of Burundi sees its Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) as a framework that responds to the post conflict needs of communities.

Although most of the policies such as the PRSP of 2005, the most recent PRSP II of 2012 and the gender policy amongst others clearly indicate the need and government's commitment to ensure women participate effectively in (post conflict) decision making, this seems to be rhetoric as most of government's actions have not fully acknowledged nor ensured women's participation. As a result women remain minimal or absent from key decision making bodies. On the other hand, in the few spaces where women have been included, their participation in decision making is prevented by their lack of understanding of women's issues and their inability to bring on board women's needs to the table and effectively ensure that policies are gender sensitive to meet the post conflict needs of women.

2.4 Women's Activities Pre and Post Arusha Peace Agreement

Isis-WICCE's documentation of women's peace efforts revealed that local women's groups contributed to the restoration of peace. They formed groups in order to undertake actions for community reconciliation and used creative method to bring women from different ethnic communities together. However, research participants observed that the government of Burundi has not utilized these groups effectively in post conflict reconstruction, neither have they adopted the bottom-up and inclusive strategies used by women to ensure that the post conflict recovery processes responds to the needs of the population. The Women Peace Centre, for example, developed early warning systems and conducted training for women peace facilitators on tracking early warning indicators of insecurity and reporting to the police and justice mechanisms at the community level. Women's groups interviewed in a focus group discussion disclosed that

they have carried out sensitization on sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and provided support to survivors of rape and domestic violence.

For women, the post-transition period was an opportunity to move from being victims of conflicts to becoming actors in the reconstruction process. Following the remarkable effort of the women of Burundi to bring peace to their communities through mobilizing in groups across cultural and tribal boundaries, women continued to support returnees, as well as carrying out mediations between neighbours that bridged ethnic gaps and divisions and built trust among communities for sustained peace. Research participants noted that although the strategies of using a bottom up inclusive approach to peace building used by women was successful, the government of Burundi has not utilized these approaches in the post conflict recovery process, neither have they utilized women's skills and experiences in peace building to contribute to the consolidation of peace. Also the government has not used the structures created on ground by women peace activists to build peace; such structures could have provided the much needed inclusion.

2.5 Political Participation – Quota's for Women

Burundi's PRSP-II, which is the current post conflict reconstruction framework, has the promotion of the implementation of the national Action Plan on UNSCR1325 as its first area of focus and equal participation in decision making and the empowerment of women as its second. Since the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement Burundi has held two successful elections in 2005 and 2010, this is evident of the strength of the democratic process that is working towards inclusive governance through the implementation of 30% affirmative action for women in politics. However, interviews with women at the district levels revealed that the 30% affirmative action was only applicable to national level elections, but women's peace groups particularly the Women's

Peace centre sensitized women at lower levels to participate in line with the CPA provisions for women's participation. During the 2005 elections with support from development partners, community-based women's groups' sensitized women on the electoral process and mobilized them to seek elective positions and vote.

The elections brought an increased number of women in parliament, with 37 out of 118 seats in the National Assembly. At the time, women were also appointed to fill important political positions, including President of the National Assembly, and the Minister of External Relations and International Cooperation; other senior ministerial roles and professional positions within government institutions and other sectors were occupied by women. The nomination of women to high-level positions within decision-making bodies of government marked the beginning of better integration of women into the governance of the country. Women were appointed into the position of President and first Vice President of the National Assembly; however after two years into these positions these women were removed and replaced with men, due to political intricacies. Women's groups interviewed expressed disappointment that women rights organizations could not mobilize to campaign for women to replace the two removed.

The 2010 elections saw an increase in the number of women attaining political leadership. The table below illustrates the level of women's political participation.

The 2005 elections brought an increased number of women in parliament, with 37 out of 118 seats in the National Assembly.

The nomination of women to high-level positions within decision-making bodies of government marked the beginning of better integration of women into the governance of the country.

The 2010 elections saw an increase in the number of women attaining political leadership.

PERIOD	2001			2005			2010		
	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women
National Assembly	37	186	19.9	37	81	30.5	34	72	32
Senate	10	43	18.8	17	32	34.6	19	22	46.3
Ministers	4	22	15.4	7	13	35	9	12	42.8
Chief of Cabinet	4	2	11.5	3	17	15			3.3
Provincial Governors	0	17	0	4	13	23.5	3	14	17.6
Communal administrators	2	127	1.5	17	112	13.1	40	89	31
Local Councillors							653	1,282	33.7

Source: Records of National Assembly and Senate

From the table above there is significant progress in the level of women's political participation, the increase in 2010 from 20.5% to 32% of women Parliamentarians and increase from 34.6% in 2005 to 46.3% in 2010 shows marked improvement. However, this notable increase in the number of women occupying senior parliamentary positions, as well as other posts in government or the civil service, has not in reality improved the overall status of women in Burundi. Women Human Rights Defenders interviewed expressed concern that despite the increased number of

women in parliament and in decision making positions, the lives of ordinary Burundian women remains unchanged. According to one of the participants:

'Women are working and behaving like men, there is no difference. Most of the women in parliament are not promoting the women's agenda, they are influenced by the party's agenda and yet it is less gender sensitive.' Perpetue, February, 2013, Bujumbura

Women are not sufficiently represented in the community level (only 17% women are *conseillères collinaires* "Hills Counselors"). There is no legal average of 30% representation, like in other institutions. Members of the civil society were of the view that even when women have the mandate to promote the political party agenda, they should be able to incorporate the women's agenda into it. They also observed that although some of the women in parliament particularly those in the ruling party are gender sensitive they lack the skills to lobby their political parties to promote laws that protect the rights of women. In addition, most of the women in parliament are not knowledgeable on women's issues due to low education.



Leadership potential of women in the community not adequately utilized

The views from a female parliamentarian interviewed shed light into the lack of impact of increased women's participation. In her opinion, the Burundi society has patriarchy entrenched both in the private and public spaces. At the household level, most women in politics find it difficult to balance work and family; this affects their performance as they have limited time to engage in wider debates that can bring changes to policies and plans in favour of women.

At the institutional level, institutional patriarchy seems to affect the operations of most public institutions including the parliament and political parties, whose practices always relegate the role of women to housekeeping and view women as lacking the capacity to contribute to



Female political candidates provided a platform to campaign

debates that shape laws and policies. Other challenges of women's participation include; low levels of education of women, the long period of war prevented women from accessing education opportunities thus women lack knowledge of development and gender issues, lack of resources to run campaigns and respond to campaign promises, and the fact that politics is still very new and women are only learning on the job.

To address the capacity needs of women in preparation for the 2010 elections, CSOs under the SPPDF coalition (where the Women's Peace Centre was an active member) with support from UNDP, UN Women, OXFAM NOVIB, ACTION AID, and CARE, etc, led an advocacy campaign to enhance women's participation in the elections. This included training up to 8,886 women candidates at low level and 193 women at the commune council level. The training covered communication skills, reporting and leadership capabilities. In addition, after the elections members of the parliament were trained by SPPDF with support from IFES. The training content included: Constitution making; analyzing policies and laws; negotiation; and leadership. The training aimed to enhance the capacity of the newly elected parliamentarians to perform their policy-making roles effectively. A significant landmark in increasing women's participation in the electoral process was the appointment of two women into the leadership of the National Electoral Commission (NEC). One of the women was appointed the Vice Chair of the Commission.

The research found that most elected women do not support the women's agenda, as most politicians view women's issues as issues of CSOs and women human rights defenders; therefore these issues are not given the required attention, both by women in politics and political parties.

2.6 Participation in the Formulation and Implementation of the National Action Plan on UNSCR1325

The development of the NAP started in 2004, however, it was only until 2011 that a final plan was adopted as a framework to promote women's participation in peace building. A national steering committee for the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was created on December 28, 2007, and chaired by the Ministry of Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, the Senate and the National Assembly. The committee includes the following key Ministries:

the Ministry of External Relations and International Cooperation; the Ministry of Public Security; the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock; the Ministry of Planning. Civil society organizations on the steering committee include Solidarité Femmes Parlementaires (SOFEPA); Forum pour le Renforcement de la Société Civile (FORSC - a network of 146 organizations that includes 11 women's organisations); Collectif des Organisations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi (CAFOB - a network of 54 Women Associations); the African Union, the United Nations Integrated Office in Burundi (BINUB), UN Women and International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR).

Women's groups including the Women Peace Centre participated in the development of the NAP 1325 for Burundi. Participants of the research stated that the process of developing the NAP was participatory as it included women's groups, civil society organizations, government institutions and donors. The process was led by the Ministry of Gender, the various meetings identified possible actions, challenges and developed achievable indicators. The activities developed were regional and covered a wide range of issues that will impact different categories of people. A Committee on the implementation of the NAP was established to fund raise for its implementation; however, as at the time of the interview in February 2013, the Committee has not met since there were not given terms of reference, neither has there been any indication of funds availability.

2.7 Truth and Reconciliation Commission

The government of Burundi is currently developing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Women interviewed testified that they participated in analyzing and amending the draft law; this means that women's perspectives were reflected in the proposed TRC law. The following

recommendations were made by women's groups who participated in the process: the proposed commission must have a women's unit; TRC staff must be trained on gender to understand the different needs of women and men; the report must highlight gender differences of the impact of war on survivors. Other recommendations include logistical facilitation for women participants, protection of women survivors by providing them with escorts to the TRC and addressing gender dynamics to enable women's effective participation. Above all, women's groups would like the TRC to be decentralized to enable more women who lack the means to access the Commission at the local levels. The law is currently being debated in parliament, women are hopeful that their recommendations will be taken into account and implemented.

2.8 Socio-Economic 'Peace' for Women?

A strong component of the PRSP I and II was the provision of livestock to women as communities lost most of their livestock during the war. However, this process of improving the standard of living of families with livestock was not a well thought out plan. According to the Programme Coordinator of the Women Peace Centre:

'Women could not cope with the requirement of providing care for the animals. The process entails providing daily treatment and weight record for the livestock. The burden of care for the livestock in addition to the existing work burden prevented women from accessing the programme. More so, women feared being asked to pay for livestock incase the one they received dies during the course of the project.' Research Participant, Bujumbura, February 2013)

Most women at the local levels do not have money, so to avoid being asked to replace dead livestock they have not been able to utilize this project. Women cannot easily access credit and loans because they find it difficult to meet requirement of conditional guarantees. There is a new approach initiated by CARE International and the Women's Peace Centre. It involves a Village Savings Loan that works with women's groups. Members of these groups have been able to access loans.



Working in groups to build an economic base

In the West province (Bubanza, Cibitoke, Bujumbura, and Maireship) it was observed that women farmers benefitted from micro finance under the consolidation of peace in Burundi Program and Peace Building Fund (PBF). Up to USD800,000 was allocated to micro-finance for women.

2.9 Women, Armed Forces and Security Sector Reform

The participation of women in the police and the army remains very low. Information gathered from the Inspector General of Police reveals that women are only 2.4% of the total police force. On the other hand the army has a similar trend, women represent only 0.05% of the army. The interview with the Deputy in Charge

“... women are only 2.4% of the total police force. On the other hand the army has a similar trend, women represent only 0.05% of the army.”

of gender in the Security Sector Reform program in the Defense Ministry reveals that there are no women in top Military positions, except from the level of Major and Captain, this means that women do not participate in decision making on issues of security. Currently there are many women in the Burundi peacekeeping mission to Somalia (Interview participant, Bujumbura 2013).

“...there are no women in top Military positions, except from the level of Major and Captain...”

With such noticeable gaps in the army and the provisions of the UNSCR1325, in the current Security Sector Reform program there are plans to establish a gender office to address the issue of mainstreaming gender into the army, particularly addressing issues of gender based violence within the army. In response to the various international humanitarian laws that calls for the inclusion of women in peace keeping forces the government of Burundi established a law on the status of officers, Non-commissioned Officers (NCOs) status, and status of troops for National Defense Force. The provisions require that recruitment must strictly respect necessary provincial, ethnic and gender balance. The same is applicable to the police. The SSR programme includes sensitizing the general public on the need for increased women’s participation in the military and police. Other components include training the army on human rights and gender based violence. A permanent “groupe de reflexion” on governance with in the security sector was put in place in 2011. The Women Peace Centre is an active member of this group.

2.10 Addressing Sexual and Gender Based Violence – Is Practice Following Policy?

Due to the increasing rate of SGBV, the government revised the Penal Code. The revised Penal Code expanded the definition of Violence Against Women (VAW) and rape, and established strong punishment for perpetrators. Despite the many laws and policies put in place, preventing

VAW seems to be a huge challenge as women find themselves trapped in violent relationships with the perception that there is no where to go if they leave the marriage; coupled with the fact that the society is patriarchal, therefore anything that men do is taken as the norm in communities. Another practice that further disempowers women and increases violence against women is the inability of women to inherit property; this makes it difficult for them to access a means of empowerment. This fact has been acknowledged by the government through the Ministry of Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender the reason the Ministry embarked on development of a law on inheritance. The proposed law has suffered a lot of setbacks as the institutional patriarchy at parliament came to play. In addition to the lack of political will on the part of Members of Parliament, men in Parliament (not excluding all women) believe that passing the law challenges the powers invested on men as heads of households.

In line with the ICGLR declaration that all countries in the region launch the Zero Tolerance campaign during the 2012 16 days of activism campaign, the government of Burundi has launched the campaign. However, the interviews revealed that there has been no follow up action to address SGBV and no funds have been made available for activities that strive to reach policy makers. At the national level, the reform of the Criminal Code took into account UNSCR1325 and 1820 on sexual violence. Articles 108; 141; 181 of the electoral code Law N 1/22 (18 September 2009) passed by the National Assembly provides 30% affirmative action for women's political participation. Furthermore, the Arusha Peace Agreement particularly states: "women promotion and equality between man and woman are an aspect of the individual's rights. It is a condition of social justice and

"women promotion and equality between man and woman are an aspect of the individual's rights.

It is a condition of social justice and also an essential means to build a viable, fair and developed society. Women's empowerment is an essential prerequisite to political, social, cultural and environmental security of all the population layers."

also an essential means to build a viable, fair and developed society. Women's empowerment is an essential prerequisite to political, social, cultural and environmental security of all the population layers."¹⁹

Despite the well intentioned policies and laws put in place to combat SGBV, the research observes that the provisions of these laws are not respected by institutions of justice and the general public, this is evidenced by increased incidences of SGBV since the signing of the Peace Agreement in 2000. Although there are no concrete national data to indicate the rate of sexual and gender based violence in Burundi, some women's organizations have collected indicative figures that show the current trend. A study carried out in Ruhoro by ITEKA a local NGO from 8 to 10 April 2010, 2173 people (1575 women and 598 men) at an IDP site confirmed that, "the prevalence of sexual violence is alarming as 81.1% of the participants revealed that they have heard about or witnessed sexual assaults on a woman."²⁰ The study also found that the war gave rise to other forms of sexual violence particularly widow inheritance, this practice entails forcing a widow to marry her brother-in-law or father-in-law. An earlier report by the Association for Human Rights Protection and Defense (APRODH)²¹ in 2006 showed increased incidences of rape, as rape represented 75.2% of sexual violence cases recorded (686 out of

"81.1% of the participants revealed that they have heard about or witnessed sexual assaults on a woman."

"... rape represented 75.2% of sexual violence cases recorded (686 out of 912 cases). The data showed that approximately 60% of the victims of rape are minors (young girls age 0 to 18 years)."

19 Arusha Agreement for peace and reconciliation in Burundi, Arusha, August, 2000, p144

20 Study on sexual violence against women in Buyengeru, Burambi, Rumonge, Kayogoro, Nyanzalac, Bukeye and Ruhororo, Bujumbura. October 2004, page 2. Cited in the Security Council Resolution 1325: Civil Society Monitoring Report, Burundi. Global Network of Women Peace builders. Available at: <http://www.gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Burundi.pdf>

21 APRODH, 2006. Annual Report. Association for Women's Rights Protection and Defense. Bujumbura, Burundi.

912 cases). The data showed that approximately 60% of the victims of rape are minors (young girls age 0 to 18 years).

Participants interviewed during the research indicated that incidences of rape are reported daily on radio stations in Bujumbura. For example in 2012 it was reported that about 4,000 school girls dropped out of school due to pregnancy, this trend has affected girls education. Most recently (February 2013) it was widely reported that four women were killed by their husbands; however, these gruesome acts have not attracted any response from women human right defenders and the Burundi Human Rights Commission (HRC). Most participants explained that women human rights defenders had planned a huge protest for the killing of the four women, but the security laws in Burundi prohibit protests. The participants expressed frustration that such laws are oppressive and have the potential to promote the violation of the rights of women, as there are no means to sensitize the general public of the situation or for WHRDs to hold government accountable for none implementation of international humanitarian laws and demand for implementation. Expressing her frustration one of the participants stated:

'We thought that with peace gender based violence will reduce, but now it is on the increase. We don't know why, but some people are of the view that it is due to increased consumption of alcohol and drug use by men. Most men are frustrated with the current economic situation and resort to drinking to deal with their depression' (Participants views during the Focus Group Discussions, Bujumbura 2013).

Research participants expressed concern that most post conflict recovery programs have excluded addressing trauma, those that resulted from the war and those resulting from post war hardships. In line with the requirement to ensure response to SGBV survivors includes a one-

stop centre for the three main services including medical, social and legal. The government of Burundi established a one-stop-centre called “Centre Humura” in the middle of the country in Gitega Province. While the establishment of this centre is commendable, one SGBV centre for the whole country with the increased incidences of SGBV is not adequate. There is however some political commitment to reducing infant and maternal mortality rates by passing a decree (no 100/136 of 16 June 2006) that aims to ensure health care subsidies are given to children less than five years of age. This will also provide for free child deliveries for women.

2.11 Conclusion

Burundi has developed policies relating to gender equality promotion (Beijing Platform for Action, CEDAW, National Gender Policy, National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325, National Strategy for Addressing Violence against Women and the Criminal Code). The Criminal code particularly provides stricter punishment for SGBV perpetrators. This is a sign of the commitment of the government to combat SGBV. However, these policies are still not fully and effectively implemented. To effectively develop the country, the government must ensure that all laws and policies are fully implemented.

The fact that the women of Burundi played significant roles in bringing peace to the country and the region is well known. Women’s peace activities enabled them to build peace across gender and ethnic lines, challenging communities to promote peace for development. They established a large number of local women’s groups that became their structures to reach the wide community on issues of peace building and reconciliation. However, in the post conflict phase the government failed to engage these women to contribute to the development and implementation of post conflict reconstruction policies and plans. In spaces where they have

been involved their participation was minimal. It would be better to integrate a community approach to reconciliation.

With regards to participation, the 2010 elections has shown great improvement on the number of women in decision making positions using the 30% affirmative action provided in the Arusha Peace Agreement and subsequently in the Constitution. This has put Burundi in the league of countries with greater women's representation, with 42% women in government, 46% and 32% in the Senate and National Assembly. However, the research reveals that the increased number of women in decision-making positions in Burundi has not led to a marked improvement in the lives of the women in the country. The following factors were identified as responsible for the disconnect between increased participation and increased gender responsive policies and actions; women's lack of understanding of women's issues, low education level of women in decision making positions, institutionalized patriarchy in private and public spaces, lack of political will on the side of government to enable women's agency to be applied in the post conflict reconstruction processes, and the inability of the women in decision making to effectively utilize the governance spaces to promote women's agenda. Women in decision making require support to improve their skills to ensure that they understand women's issues and are able to promote the same in policy making.

2.12 Recommendations

- The government of Burundi must move from developing strategies to implementing existing laws by developing realistic work plans and budgets for implementation

- To ensure effective use of the 30% (at the least) affirmative action, it must be extended to all levels of governance particularly the lower levels (including technical posts that require no elections), to ensure that women are provided a level playing ground;
- To address the disconnect between increased women's participation in decision-making and improved women's lives, government and development partners must develop a strong skills enhancement program that includes gender and diversity for women in leadership positions;
- Women's groups must identify women survivors to participate in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, such women must be supported through transport facilitation and counseling to be able to participate effectively;
- More attention should be paid to sensitization on gender based violence to break the silence on GBV in the army and other security sector institutions

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LIBERIA

3.1 War, Patriarchy and Women's Power – a Historical Glance

Liberia has a history of 'black colonialism' linked to American history of African slavery. It was formed by descendants of freed slaves that were resettled from the USA, West Indies, and from slave ships off the West African Coast at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Fuest, 2008: 2004-5). Liberia's history of war is partly linked to racial and ethnic hierarchies that were created at the start of Liberia's 'nationhood' in 1847. A hegemony of the Americo-liberians combined with patriarchal hierarchical organizations based on labour and marriage are some of the root causes of militarism and war. Other factors include the leaders' propensity to allow unchecked exploitation of the country's resources and domestic slavery of those considered dependants, especially male and female youth. According to Mama and Okazaway (2012: 114) "Structural inequalities kept all but a small elite of Liberian women at the base of the formal economy, heavily reliant on farming, informal trading and other entrepreneurial activities that drew on extensive socioeconomic networks." Despite a male dominant political economy, there was a growing proportion of urban women who acquired land and property (Fuest, 2008: 206-7). Women in certain parts of the country commanded considerable space for socio-political manoeuvre. In the centre and northwest of Liberia, for example, due to the existence of women's secret societies (called *sande*)²², women could obtain access to powerful positions by 'playing the male game' and controlling junior dependants (Bledsoe, 1980: 110). In the South east, members of *Sande* gained control over junior dependants through a 'women chief' and council of elders who had both deliberative role and veto power over important decisions made by men (Mohan, 2006: 40-8). These women were also known for organizing collective female demonstrations.

22 Members of *sande* are known to have esoteric skills and knowledge that enables them to control girls fertility and health. During girls initiation ceremonies (that used to be compulsory), *Sande* could extort considerable amounts of money and services from senior relatives of initiates and prospective husbands (Fuest, 2008: 207; Bledsoe, 1980: 110).

In 1980, Americo-Liberian political leadership was overthrown via a coup – this marked the beginning of mass atrocities, political rivalry and militarism.²³ The war displaced half the population and killed between 150 -200,000 people. Without undermining the impact of these atrocities on women’s further disempowerment and concomitant entrenchment of patriarchy, it is worth stating that some women were able to use the war as an opportunity to live beyond victimhood and gain some economic leverage. Utas (2005: 408) refers to this as “Tactic agency”, a limited-level agency, somewhere between agency and victimhood. Women who lived in proximity to fighting forces were able to take advantage of trade behind enemy lines and along borders by using contacts with government armies and militia groups. Some women traders made an income from dangerous ‘unreached’ food demands. During ‘peace time’ women took advantage of ‘peacekeeping economy’²⁴ that provided marginal employment such as construction work on roads and bridges. Many women became heads of households due to displacement and the war and were able to acquire and own property. They were also able to benefit from economic empowerment projects run as part of DDR programmes. There was also lucrative income that could be made from engaging in intimate relationships with peace keeping officers either as girl

23 The war in Liberia began in 1985 with the invasion of Liberia by Charles Taylor who was backed by Cote d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso. The international community and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) pressured the government of Liberia led by Charles Taylor and the belligerent forces Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), to come to the peace table on 4 June 2003, to end the highly destructive civil war that had been raging intermittently for 14 years. Other major political groups included: National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and United Movement for Democracy and Liberation in Liberia (ULIMO).

24 According to Aning and Edu-Afful (2013: 21) Liberia has hosted three large peace keeping operations (ECOMOG, UNOMIL, and UNMIL). This has brought in staff of about 31374 with an estimated cost of 1 billion dollars. Huge numbers of UNMIL and ECOMOG peacekeepers that were deployed created a ‘dual’ economy “...one that serves the needs of the peacekeeping environment and another that serves the local population”(21).

friends, wives or as commercial sex workers.²⁵ Many women were able to cover costs such as rent, school fees, daily upkeep, and medical bills (Aning and Edu-Afful, 2013: 23-24). Utas (2005: 408) explains that women held multiple and seemingly contradictory roles as "...mistress, girlfriend, prisoner, multiple-rape victim, refugee, fighter and trader" that offered relative spaces of socio-economic power.

Women also held significant political spaces of power during and after the 14 year war. Ruth S. Perry was nominated as chair of the Council of State, which governed Liberia in 1996, six years after the overthrow and murder of former dictator Samuel K. Doe. She was the first female African to serve as head of state. From the outbreak of the war until the new government was formed in 2006, 15 ministerial posts were occupied by women, compared to only three posts under the Doe regime in the 1980s (Fuest, 2008: 2014-15). According to international observers more women than men registered during the 2005 elections. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's presidency has been hailed as evidence of Liberian women's ability to lead in spite of complex patriarchal militarized governance systems.

Another space in which women have held political sway has been their active involvement in the peace process. Outraged at the violence that wracked their nation, Liberian women worked to accelerate the peace process. As chronicled in the award winning documentary film "Pray the Devil Back to Hell" and acknowledged by the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize committee, thousands of Liberian women joined together in an interfaith peace movement, rallying

"... thousands of Liberian women joined together in an interfaith peace movement, rallying and protesting to end war and barricading peace talks in Ghana until negotiators reached an agreement."

25 According to Aning and Edu-Afful, 2013: 23) "Peacekeepers' participation in transactional sex and abusive relationships has resulted in the 'Ecobabies' and 'UNOMIL babies' phenomenon, whereby 30,000 children have been fathered by officials and civilians from ECOMOG and UNOMIL missions."

and protesting to end war and barricading peace talks in Ghana until negotiators reached an agreement.²⁶ The Liberian Women Initiative (LWI) ensured that female representatives participated in the Accra Clarification Conference, a key peace negotiating forum held in 1994. By insisting that women were represented to the conference, the LWI encouraged a degree of consciousness among the belligerents that the aspirations of all parties should be considered and not just those of the warring factions.

It is remarkable that the 2003 Liberian Peace Agreement contains, in contrast to many other peace agreements, some gender-relevant commitments. It states that women should be included in the Governance Reform Commission and that members of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly should come inter alia from women organizations. Article XXVIII, dealing with 'national balance', contains a striking exception to comparable peace agreements: 'The parties shall reflect national and gender balance in all elective and non-elective appointments' within the National Transitional Government of Liberia. As Fuest (2008: 214) states "Such statements cannot be ascribed to inspiration from the warlords at the negotiating tables; they are to be credited to influential women's organizations..." who worked against odds of formal exclusion from female representation in government- led peace talks.

"... women should be included in the Governance Reform Commission and that members of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly should come inter alia from women organizations."

26 The women of Liberia under the banner of the Women in Peace building Network (WIPNET) had earlier initiated advocacy and non-violent protests to pressure both sides to cease fire unconditionally. Seven women representing various organisations within the network went to Ghana (where the negotiations were being held) to mobilise Liberian refugee women to join the campaign. The women began protesting on the day that the peace talks officially commenced. It was anticipated that the talks would last three weeks, but in reality, they lasted for three months (see Ekiyor, Thelma and Gbowee, Leymah, 'Women's Peace Activism, the Liberian Women's Experience', in Paul Van Tongeren, Juliette Verhoeven, Malin Brenk and Marte Hellema, People Building Peace II, Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienne, 2005).

Overall, the period following the end of the conflict in Liberia provided more opportunities for the participation of women and other civil society organizations in the reconstruction of the country. The inclusion of representatives from civil society in the transitional government meant that civil society organizations (though fewer in number than those from the government and political parties) played a role in the formulation of policy. This meant that civil society was recognized as a viable player. Specific government policies on gender equality further opened the door for women to get involved.

3.2 Policy Framework – Legal Gender Equality Becomes Possible?

The Liberian government has ratified a number of international women's rights and human rights related conventions including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and the Maputo protocol among others. This is a commitment by the government of Liberia to fulfill, respect and promote the culture of rights. These international instruments buttress the 1986 Liberian Constitution that enshrines the principle of gender equality.

A Ministry for Gender and Development was established in 2001. In addition, after Taylor's departure in August 2003, the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) and other female activists have effected the passing of an 'inheritance law' to regulate women's marriage rights, rights to property, and access to their children after divorce or widowhood. A 'rape law', turning rape into an un-bailable

"A 'rape law', turning rape into an un-bailable offence, was passed in January 2006. Other efforts include the formulation of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Liberia (NSSRL) in 2008."

offence, was passed in January 2006. Other efforts include the formulation of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Liberia (NSSRL) in 2008. It calls for gender mainstreaming in the security sector at all levels and incorporating gender awareness and gender sensitivity in Security Sector Institutions' training curricula. In March 2009, Liberia was the first African country to adopt a National Action Plan (NAP) for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

The Ministry of Gender and Development (MoGD) has further played a key role by developing gender policies, action plans and procedures facilitating the prevention of and response to sexual violence cases. In 2009, it launched the National Gender Policy promoting gender equality and gender mainstreaming in national development processes. The MoGD also developed the National Gender-Based Violence Plan of Action (GBV-PoA). This plan aims to achieve a well developed and integrated national protection system that will address GBV, including sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). The MoGD seeks to strengthen the institutional framework for coordinating and monitoring implementation of the GBV-PoA. The goals of the plan include reducing GBV by 30% by the year 2011 and providing appropriate care and services to survivors of GBV. In 2009, the MoGD developed standard operating procedures (SOPs) for preventing and responding to GBV at the national level. It also developed county specific SOPs for addressing GBV at county level. These SOPs have helped to create a more coordinated and multi-sectoral approach to addressing GBV in Liberia.

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However, as in other countries, despite the government's commitments to adhere to the standards of rights frameworks and gender inequality, women continue to be socially, politically and economically marginalised. Gender based violence disproportionately affects women and girls. Despite the good laws put in place, violence against women has continued to escalate. This has called for special efforts to address the gender disparities.

3.3 From 'Securitized' Sexual Violence to Women's Peace

The Liberian National Action Plan on UNSCR1325 Pillar 1 on Protection emphasizes the protection of women and girls from all types of violence including sexual and gender based violence basing on 3 strategies; provide psychosocial and trauma counseling for women and girls, protect the rights and strengthen security for women and girls, and increase access to quality education for women and girls with specific emphasis on reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.

Even before the plunder and devastation of the civil war, Liberia's security institutions were male dominated and heavily politicized by officials of government, and survived on patronage. Its personnel were poorly trained and had no special civic education programmes and saw themselves and their political patrons as masters of the people. They became unpopular for their lack of professionalism, corruption, frequent human rights violations and their exploitation by their political patrons to intimidate and at times, terrorise the people. The Liberian forces were part of the political process and thereby lost their neutrality and relevance as enforcers of the law and protectors of the people. The ruthlessness of these forces was seen during the civil war, when most of them joined factions and led campaigns of terror against the civilians. After the civil war and with virtually no reliable security institutions left in the country, it became politically

necessary to re-organise, train and rebuild an effective and well trained pro-people security regime for the country, as part of the post war governance reform process.

3.3.1 Security Sector Reform

Liberia's Security Sector Reform Programme was conceived to address the above historical faults, and to create a secure and peaceful environment, both domestically and in the sub-region, that is conducive to sustainable, inclusive, and equitable growth and development. In the Poverty Reduction Strategy of Liberia (PRS) of 2008-2011, the government articulated issues of Peace and security as a first priority, without which there could be no real development in the country. The first pillar of the PRS was therefore "consolidating peace and security". Liberia's Security Sector Reform Programme is legally empowered by three enabling instruments. These are the Comprehensive Peace Accord of 2003, the Constitution of Liberia, and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1509 of 2003.

Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2008-11 notes that in the past Security Sector Institutions (SSIs) have demonstrated poor professionalism and accountability, a lack of respect for human rights, the recruitment of untrained individuals and poor management. The PRS recognized that there are many challenges in pursuing development, democracy and transparent governance, gender based violence and institutional discrimination against marginalized groups such as women. It considered necessary institutional reforms to promote justice and equality and urged

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SSIs to adopt codes of conduct addressing discrimination, domestic violence and sexual harassment. The PRS priority action matrix on peace and security called for the participation of women to reach 20% in the military and in other SSIs by 2010.

3.3.2 Women in policing

Efforts to strengthen women's participation in policing was demonstrated initially by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). In January 2007, India sent an innovative all female Formed Police Unit to serve as part of UNMIL. The unit guarded officials, supported LNP training and security efforts, and served as role models for Liberians, visited villages and spoke in schools and colleges about their experiences. As shared by Rakhi Sahi, the commander of the Indian Formed Police Unit in 2007,

“Besides achievements as a police officer, I think the biggest accomplishment that I can talk about is building up the confidence of the Liberian women ... Women as well as men in Liberia look up to us. For them, it is a very unique feature that women can take up arms and stand on the roadside and protect civilians”.

From 2% female officers in 2005, the police has increased its proportion of female officers to 17% by 2011 (623 female officers out of 4,039). (Bacon, Laura, 2012). By 2011, the 623 female LNP personnel had received training at the National Police Training Academy. The academy incorporated gender sensitive training modules into its training curriculum.

The LNP has achieved a 15% proportion of women in its ranks. Out of 4,039 officers, 623 are women. LNP has further assigned female officers to some of its police stations. Twenty

three women hold senior level positions as heads of divisions and sections, and commanders of police stations and their ranks range from lieutenant to deputy commissioner of police.

The development of the LNP gender policy to guide gender mainstreaming and female participation has laid a firm foundation for recruitment and retention of women in the LNP. Of the 20% female-male targeted ration, 15% has been accomplished. The establishment of the gender affairs section within the LNP has further helped to oversee the implementation of the Gender Policy.

During this study, it was noted that the Liberian National Police has also progressed with regard to enhancing its response mechanisms in addressing sexual and gender based violence. LNP established the Women and Children Protection Service (WACPS) Unit in September 2005 and began with a staff of 25 with the mandate of investigating all forms of violence affecting women such as domestic violence, sexual abuse, illegal adoption and child abandonment, and human trafficking. In 2009, the WACPS in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice developed the 2009 SOPs for preventing and responding to sexual and gender based violence.

The WACPS has played a key role in conducting outreach sessions with other police units and community sensitization on proper reporting channels and to enable Liberians understand that rape was a reportable crime. This public awareness has increased demands on the WACPS.

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By 2011, 217 section officers were stationed in 52 police stations across all of Liberia's 15 counties.

In 2009, the Ministry of Justice designed mechanisms to address the police's challenges in responding to gender based violence. This included establishing a Special court E, a fast track mechanism intended to overcome Liberia's backlog of sexual assault cases. To protect privacy, the court's in camera hearings took place in the Judge's chambers, with participation limited to the Judge, a clerk, the witness (es), and lawyers. The ministry also created a Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Crimes Unit to counsel victims, improve police officers' ability to run investigations, coordinate police officers and prosecutors and train prosecutors to tackle cases involving sexual violence and build public awareness. The SGBV Crimes unit, as the unit responsible for prosecuting SGBV Crimes, links the police to courts.

Although the joint initiatives of the Special Court and the SGBV Crimes unit are promising steps, there is disappointment that more cases are not tried and convicted. For instance, by 2011, the justice system remained sluggish, and many have described it as a deterrent to the fight against SGBV. The Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) reported that 110 rape cases were on the court's docket as of 2007, but only one had been assigned for trial. From 2009 to 2011, the SGBV Crimes Unit was able to try only 16 out of approximately 200 cases through

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However, despite this progress, women are still poorly represented in the LNP's specialized or elite forces such as the Police Support Unit (PSU) and Emergency Response Unit (ERU). Of the 523 operational PSU officers in July 2011, only 31% were women. Of the 324 ERU officers in 2011, only 19 (6%) are women. In addition, while the number of female police officers has been rising, there are few female police officers deployed outside the capital Monrovia. Of the 71 WACPS officers deployed around the country in 2011, only 5 (7%) were in rural counties.

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The police are also heavily constrained with regards to operational requirements. They lack transportation and communication, as well as motivation. This heavily deters their ability to investigate cases, engage in community policing as well as ensuring that women in communities can have confidence in the services provided.

3.3.3 Women in the Armed Forces of Liberia

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) are composed of the army, the coast guard and the air force and operate under the authority of the new National Defense Act of 2008. The commander in chief President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf heads the AFL and is responsible for the operational effectiveness, readiness, moral and probity of the AFL. In March 2011, there were 74 women out of a total of 2,017 AFL personnel (a female to male ratio of 3.67%).

Unit	Men	Women	Total
AFL Headquarters	16	2	18
Brigade Hq	1525	17	1,542
Armed Forces Training Centre	125	4	129
Liberian Coast Guard	39	1	40
AFL Band	46	5	51
Logistics and Communication	192	45	237
Total	1,943	74	2017

Source: Government of Liberia

The AFL does not have a gender policy, however, in accordance with Liberia's National Gender Policy, the Ministry of National Defense and the AFL appointed gender focal persons which is a positive step.

There has also been an attempt to incorporate issues related to preventing sexual harassment and sexual assault including rape in the training modules for new recruits within the AFL. However, there is still more work to be done to make the AFL attractive and sensitive to women and girls.

3.3.4 Women activists and community policing

The Women in Peace Building Network and other women groups have continued to advocate for the protection of women's rights using several advocacy strategies. Through engagements with government and other development partners, women have been involved in the community policing. For instance at the peak of the disarmament process, UNMIL had failed to manage the ex-combatants in Totota, Bong County. It took the intervention of WIPNET members in Totota who used their tactics of mediation for the ex-combatants to hand over the arms and only allowed WIPNET to support their rehabilitation and healing process.

At the community level, the WIPNET Peace huts have been recognized as a model and a space where resolution of conflicts including GBV cases is done, as well as a meeting space for discussing women's rights issues. The Ministry of Gender and Development has adopted and replicated the Peace Huts in different parts of the country.

3.3.5 Truth and Reconciliation Commission and women

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was designed to complement the efforts of the DDRR. Women groups provided input in the drafting of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Act which led to the national Assembly's creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2005 mandated to promote and facilitate reconciliation and healing. The TRC was tasked 'to promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation' by investigating gross human rights violations and violations of humanitarian law, sexual violations, and economic crimes that occurred between January 1979 and October 2003. In addition, the commission was mandated

to provide a forum against impunity, establish the record of the past and compile a public report with findings and recommendations. The commission consisted of four women and five men.

A Gender Committee, composed of governmental and non-governmental experts on women's issues, was established to advise the TRC on issues faced by female survivors of sexual violence. During the process, the committee used various methods to increase women's participation. Respondents of this study also reported that under the auspices of the consortium of women civil society organizations under the umbrella of the Women's NGOs Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), women across Liberia were mobilized in 2009 to give input into the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and recommendations. Among the recommendations given included; immediate medical assistance for sexual violations in the form of health care for survivors of rape and other medical support to victims. Although the TRC had made many efforts to reach communities throughout Liberia, women organizations believed that women needed additional and alternative ways in which to engage with the TRC and to be a part of the process.

The TRC report was presented to the Assembly at Senate but could not be endorsed and this stalled the progress in addressing the recommendations. As shared by one of the respondents;

“Every Liberian played a role in the war in different capacities or was violated. Yet it was a requirement that stakeholders should come up and say sorry. This was a huge task and so reconciliation had a bottleneck. People are hurting and disgruntled, and not reconciling”.

Encouragingly, the government's official response to the TRC report was fairly positive. The President officially discussed its content, first at the Independence Day address on July 26,

2009, and again when she delivered her State of the Nation address on January 25, 2010. She signaled her commitment to implementing those recommendations that were within the TRC's mandate and conformed to Liberia's constitution. During her address to the nation, the president noted,

“While one may not agree with all of the findings and recommendations resulting from the report, there is no doubt that it dissects and analyzes our problems and makes meaningful recommendations for the healing, reconciliation, restoration of peace, prosperity and progress of our nation.”²⁷

The TRC report further acknowledges its failure to capture the extent of sexual-based violence against women, which it noted was underreported during the commission's process. It also acknowledges that the TRC Act anticipated the potential challenges in securing statements from victims of sexual violence and thus the commission repeatedly sought mechanisms to try to capture women's experiences. Nonetheless, the TRC was ultimately unable to reach the majority of victims of sexual violence, leaving their experiences largely unrecorded. The report also acknowledged that the commission failed to collect adequate information on the experiences of female combatants. This, in turn, has limited the report's ability to make findings that accurately reflect the multiplicity of roles played by women during the conflict beyond those of victims. The conclusions allude to the fact that all factions committed gender based violence against women and that the massive wave of gross violations assumed a systematic pattern of abuse.

²⁷ Annual message delivered on 25th January 2010 to the fifth session of the 52nd National Legislature of the Republic of Liberia by Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. (pg 89). http://emansion.gov.lr/doc/2010_Annual_message_final_as_completed_on_4_February_2010.pdf. Accessed on 29th March 2013.

3.4 Prevention – Options for Women?

The Liberian National Action Plan on UNSCR1325 Pillar 2 emphasizes the prevention of violence against women and girls including rape and systematic rape, trafficking and other human rights abuses.

In Liberia, during the conflict years, serious human rights abuses and war crimes were committed against civilians and especially women and girls who constituted the major target atrocities such as rape and other forms of sexual and gender based violence. According to the Isis-WICCE report (2008), out of a sample of 515 women and girls in four counties, 62.5% had experienced sexual violence. The gender violence that women suffered during the conflict caused extensive damage to their psychological, reproductive and gynaecological health. These findings are further affirmed by yet an earlier study by WHO, Ministry of Gender and Development and Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (2006). In 10 out of 15 counties, a sample of 2858 women and girls indicated that rape accounted for 73.9% of sexual violence.

The government of Liberia has taken steps to reduce sexual violence against women. In 2006, the Ministry of Gender and Development developed the National Gender Based Violence Plan of Action which aimed to provide physical, psychological, economic and legal support to girls and women victims of gender

“In 10 out of 15 counties, a sample of 2858 women and girls indicated that rape accounted for 73.9% of sexual violence.”

“In 2006, the Ministry of Gender and Development developed the National Gender Based Violence Plan of Action which aimed to provide physical, psychological, economic and legal support to girls and women victims of gender based violence in different communities.”

based violence in different communities. In addition, the Gender Based Violence Unit of the MoGD was also established to respond to the challenges of coordination and collaboration as identified by major stakeholders in GBV prevention and case management. It was envisaged then that a functional GBV unit would support an effective and efficient prevention system as well as a reliable data bank of GBV cases. To further strengthen the prevention and response mechanisms for SGBV, Standard Operating Procedures were developed and rolled out in ten counties with the objective of standardizing SGBV response mechanisms, establishing a framework for accountability and ensuring that all GBV actors adhere to best practices and minimum standards that meet international ethical guidelines.

The GBV Unit maintains a database of GBV cases across Liberia and most of them are reported by INGOs, NGOs and hospitals. In 2009, 900 cases were reported. In 2010 and 2011; 2,029 and 2,383 cases were reported. In 2012, 2,493 GBV cases were reported as having occurred in 2012. (MoGD, 2011, 2012). Whereas there is an increase in the reporting of cases, there is no systematic model of collecting GBV cases. As noted by the GBV coordinator and other women activists, the reporting has been left at the onus of families and yet they are constrained by threats from relatives and community members not to report and financial challenges.

Rape was codified as a criminal offense in 2006 through the amended Rape Act. The Act expanded the definition of rape by rising the age of consent to 18 years, and imposed longer sentences on perpetrators. The Act then spurred the creation of the Special Court for Rape and Other Forms of Violence in 2008. To carry out the prosecution of cases by this court, the Ministry of Justice created the Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) unit. The unit was also tasked with providing community outreach, a 24 hour victims' hotline service and awareness-programs. However, deficiencies within the justice system have hindered prosecution of these cases and only a few have gone to trial. As noted by Lena Cummings,

“Even with a strong rape law, rape cases have become a common issue in many communities. We have continued to campaign against SGBV in 10 counties in Liberia. Victims are often reluctant to complain because of threats from rapists, social stigma attached to rape victims, the trivialization of rape cases by male police officers, and inadequate lawyers to prosecute perpetrators of rape”.

It was also noted that culture is another factor contributing to the low prosecution rate. Women and girls who go to the police because of rape or sexual violence are often pressured by the police and family members not see the case through. Other times, women and girls are treated poorly through the reporting processes.

With support from SIDA, and through the Joint Programme on SGBV, an endowment fund was established to provide support to survivors for medical care and to superintend their cases. Funds were distributed to the 15 counties to ensure that survivors have access to services. A committee comprising of representatives from NGOs, the Superitendant's office, the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Justice and MoGD was established in the 15 counties to ensure that there is transparency in the distribution of funds. Support included medication, economic empowerment and relocation of survivors. Additionally, the Norwegian Refugee Council supported the leasing of a transit home in Kakata to lodge GBV survivors who travelled from far distances for their cases to be tried. They were provided with basic services while at the transit home.

Sexual and Gender based violence including rape increases the risk of HIV transmission. The National treatment protocols specify the PEP regimen and package to be given to survivors of sexual assault and rape victims. The package includes emergency contraception, prevention and treatment of STI, prevention of tetanus, HIV post-exposure prophylactic kits for STI, and

PEP for accidental occupational and sexual exposure which are given to major health centres and hospitals. Data from the 2007 population based LDHS study consistently show statistically significantly higher HIV prevalence rates for women than for men, especially in urban areas and in the younger age groups of 15-29 and 35-44 years, with women showing up to 2-3 times higher rates than men. Overall the HIV prevalence in women is higher (1.8%) than in men (1.2%) revealing women's higher vulnerability to HIV infection. Data from the 2007 sentinel study among women attending ANC clinics in 13 selected urban and two rural sites show alarming HIV rates of more than 7% in four out of 15 sites, with 10.4 in Sinje Health Centre. While these data may not be representative for the overall female population in Liberia, it clearly shows that HIV has reached worrying levels in specific urban communities, reflecting the vulnerabilities and risks facing these women.



Liberian women take lead in HIV/AIDS campaigns

The Government of Liberia through the National AIDS and STI Control Program, and the MoGD worked with UNAIDS to develop a global Strategy to ensure that a strategic mechanism is put in place to address HIV and AIDS among women, girls and children. These efforts culminated in the global launch for the UNAIDS Agenda for Women and Girls in 2010. Consequently, having been a member of the task force, Liberia followed suit and launched its National Operational Plan for the Agenda. The MoGD emphasizes its commitment to generating and sustaining an SGBV & HIV movement that increases the services for women and those living with HIV given that 58%

of people living with HIV in Liberia are women. However, despite these efforts stigma among women living with HIV is very high and deters their active participation in the reconstruction of their communities. HIV and AIDS has not been tackled as a development issue and therefore programming efforts have not prioritised HIV.

3.5 Participation and Empowerment of Women – more than Quotas

3.5.1 Women in the peace negotiations

The increase in women's political participation in Liberia can be attributed to several phenomena, but primarily, to a vibrant and active civil society. Organizations such as the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), the Women in Peace-Building Network (WIPNET), and the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) were prominent in the official and informal peace process in Liberia, and recognized internationally for their efforts. After intense advocacy and as a result of their critical involvement in spurring negotiations for peace, representatives of the Liberian women's movement participated in the Accra talks as observers. Days before the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in August 2003, women's groups convened in Accra in order to analyze the talks from a gender perspective and design strategies for the inclusion of women in the transitional government. Representatives from 45 groups attended the meeting and jointly issued the Golden Tulip Declaration.²⁸ The document called for a change in women's status at the talks from observers to delegates with full voting rights. It also advocated 50 percent representation of women in transitional leadership structures and encouraged women to support female candidates.

28 The Golden Tulip declaration of Liberian women attending the peace talks in Accra Ghana. In: Peace Women. Issue 30, September 2003. http://www.peacewomen.org/publications_eneews_issue.php?id=105. Accessed on March 29th, 2013.

Although representatives of MARWOPNET participated as observers to the talks, women remained marginalized in the negotiations. As a result, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement does not contain a quota for women's participation. It does note, however, in Article 28 that: "The parties shall reflect national and gender balance in all elective and non-elective appointments within the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL)." It also calls for "gender balance" with regard to program implementation during national reconstruction and development. The dividend for women was that only three female cabinet ministers were appointed out of 21 positions, and only four members of the 76-seat legislature were women (5.3 percent).

3.5.2 Women in the transitional governance

During this study, women reported that following the low levels of women's representation in the transitional administration, women's organizations were more determined than ever to see women in leadership positions in the new government in 2005. The Ministry of Gender and Development with support from UNIFEM, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and UNDP organized a national women's consultation on Peace and Socio-economic recovery in Liberia which brought together 250 women. The group adopted the Unification Day Declaration, calling for 30 percent minimum representation of women in elected and appointed positions, among other recommendations. The Declaration was distributed to the Chairman of the NTGL and to the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA), which took the rare step of debating the document and adopting a resolution of support.

However, a positive development arose through the woman-headed National Elections Commission (NEC). In the original draft electoral reform law, prepared by the NEC and submitted to the transitional legislature, a requirement of 30 percent women's representation was stipulated for all political parties applying to participate in the 2005 national elections.

Chairperson Frances Johnson Morris rationalized this through the principles of the Liberian constitution and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. She also noted: “This country cannot develop if we continue to keep women in the backseat.” (UNIFEM, 2006). Unfortunately, this aspect of the electoral reform law encountered opposition in the legislature and was eliminated. In response, in September 2004, women met with the transitional parliamentary Speaker George Dweh to advocate for revisions to the draft electoral law. After numerous delays, the transitional legislature adopted the electoral reform bill in December 2004, but without specific mention of women or gender. This was yet another disappointment for the women.

Women’s organizations continued with the advocacy at all fronts to encourage and influence the political parties as they formulated candidate lists. Their efforts met with some success. In June 2005, six months after the passage of the electoral reform law, the NEC Chairperson announced that the body would use its statutory powers to issue a non-binding guideline requiring political parties to submit candidate lists with 30 percent women’s representation.²⁹ The Political Party and Independent Candidates Registration Guideline 15.2 encouraged a 30 percent women’s quota on the electoral lists, equally affecting individual political parties and coalition groups.³⁰ These efforts led to 110 women candidates (14%) on the final lists in August 2005 out of a total of 762. Although several political parties took considerable pains to follow the NEC guideline, most did not. In fact, none of the parties achieved the 30 percent goal.

29 Wrokpoh, Patrick K (2005). NEC will demand 30% women candidates says chairman. In: The Inquirer. June 23, 2005. <http://www.concern-liberians.org>. Accessed on 23rd March 2013.

30 National elections Commission (2005). Guidelines relating to coalitions and alliances. http://www.ifes.org/media/files/publications/EMB%20Regulations/2005/845/NEC_Guidelines_Coalitions_Alliances_20050204.pdf. Accessed on 23rd March 2013.

3.5.3 Women as civic educators and election monitors

The Liberian Women's Initiative and the Women in Peace-Building Network (WIPNET), among other groups engaged in grassroots civic education. The most important intervention was made with regard to voter registration. Although majority of people had registered, only 24% were women. In response, UNDP and UNIFEM partnered with the NEC and the Ministry of Gender and Development to enlist women's organizations to mobilize women's vote. Initially many women expressed indifference to voting given that government structures had never before benefitted them as a group. With five days left to the registration period, many realized that the market women were not registering. In response, a coalition of 200 women, led by WIPNET, provided transportation, childcare, and supervision of market stalls to allow women the means and peace of mind to leave their work and register to vote. At the end of the five days, more than 7,400 women had registered to vote. Their efforts contributed to a significant increase in the percentage of female voter registration. Over only a two-week period, the NEC recorded a jump in women's registration from 24 percent to over 50 percent.

Women organizations have continued to mobilize women to ensure that they exercise their right to vote and select leaders of their choice. In the 2009 Montserrado County Senatorial by elections and the 2011 General elections, WIPNET partnered with other civil society organizations and formed a domestic/elections monitoring coalition to ensure a violence free and transparent elections. As a result of the collaborative efforts, the coalition carried out activities such as training, deployment and monitoring, hosting of radio talk shows and reporting. Having deployed up to about 2000 monitors the coalition continued to encourage voters to vote given that the momentum was very low among voters' during the process.

3.5.4 Women in Parliament

From the efforts exhibited by women, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of women in governance. Since the election of President Sirleaf in 2005, she had called for a greater representation of women in Liberia's parliament. She has appointed more women to government positions than any government. For example, women hold 31% of top ministerial posts, 29% of deputy minister positions and 25% of the assistant minister posts. Women also head 28% of 25 key government agencies. There has also been a significant increase in the proportion of seats held by women in the National Legislature from 5.7% in 1997 to 12.5% in 2006. Following the 2011 elections, women now hold 8 seats in the national legislature (11%) and 4 seats in the senate (13.3%).

Mechanisms have further been introduced to enable increased women's representation. For example, the Women's Legislative Caucus, a multi party committee in the House of Representatives, was created to enable a gender sensitive approach in the parliament. In May 2010, the caucus introduced the Gender Equity in Politics Bill, proposing that women occupy at least 30% of all national elected offices and leadership positions in political parties. The bill was defeated but efforts are in place to revive it.



Estella Nelson (inset) deliberates at a dialogue with Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Women Peace Activists under the “Women Interest Group”³¹ have continued to lobby for increased participation of women and they are delighted that they are always accorded space to dialogue with the President on matters affecting women.³²

“For the first time, the president made commitment to do better. The President has a stronger political will now to deal with women’s issues. Our concern is not just about 30%. There is need to increase the number of women in leadership positions by 50% at all levels of governance. Liberia needs to make a statement that women make a difference in governance and the President has the Executive Power to make this happen.” Grace Yeanay.

However, despite this progress, women’s participation in governance is still low. Women respondents during this study were concerned that “If the Equity Bill is not supported and enacted this time, women will have lost the opportunity when they had the power at their disposal. It is important to have more women from local governance structures”. They were also concerned that women in leadership lack a common understanding and conception for the Women’s Agenda as echoed by a respondent “It is all about myself, power and money. The Agenda for Women is not their priority”. Another emerging issue was in line with the modalities of appointing women in key positions which was majorly based on contact and no conscious effort of positioning women in strategic positions.

31 The group includes religious, academic institutions, business entities, civil society, community based women organizations including women’s rights activists, and women in politics

32 Consultative and Agenda Setting Dialogue with H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf; November 22nd 2012.

3.6 Conclusion

The Government of Liberia has demonstrated its commitment to providing women the space to engage in the post conflict reconstruction era and a number of pro-women policies and legislation have been enacted. Although the election of a female president is a clear manifestation of women's ascending role in leadership and development, having a woman in presidency does not automatically guarantee women greater roles in positions of power or in Liberia's reconstruction. This can only be achieved if systematic and structural obstacles are addressed. A number of challenges including; traditions and cultural barriers, low technical competencies among women, retrogressive justice system, multiparty democracy, trauma, poverty, and low financing for gender related work, among others continue to deter women's effective participation.

Women of Liberia have made indisputable contributions to achieving and maintaining peace, yet their work is far from over. In order to ensure long lasting stability, women must be supported both at the national, regional and international levels.

3.7 Recommendations

Capacity Building

Train women and civil society organizations as policy advocates. Women and civil society organizations must receive training to transition from grassroots mobilizing activities to advocacy and development work. However, capacity training alone is not enough, improving basic education and skills will also enhance women's ability to influence policy.

Financing for Gender Equality

There is need for a consistent funding framework that focuses on programmatic interventions rather than projects. Achieving gender equity can only be realized over a longer time framework and require a sustained resource base.

Delivery of Justice

The delivery of justice was identified as a major deterrent in the realization of women's rights and the fight against sexual and gender based violence. Justice systems and structures should be further strengthened and within the rich of communities.

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SIERRA LEONE

4.1 War, Justice, and Patriarchy – Current Status

The Republic of Sierra Leone is located on the west coast of Africa totaling to about 28,000 square miles (71,740 square kilo meters). It borders the Atlantic Ocean, on the west and south west; Guinea on the north and north-east, and the republic of Liberia on the east and south-east. The country is a constitutional republic comprising of four regions; western, southern, eastern and northern. The regions are further divided into fourteen districts, and 149 chiefdoms. The governance system is decentralized by the Local Government Act of 2004. The population stands at 6.1 million as of 2011, 52% of the population being female; and about 26.8% of the population within the age bracket of 10 and 24 years (UNPF, 2012). Whereas Sierra Leone is enriched in natural resources such as gold, diamond, rutile, bauxite, water among others, it is estimated that 70% of Sierra Leonean's live below the poverty line (UNPF, 2012). Sierra Leone has a gross national income at \$881 per capita (UNDP human development index of 2012).

This poor economic status can be linked to the instability that the country has experienced in the past, and in particular the war that lasted from 1991 to 2002, which negatively affected the governance system resulting in a failure of the state to control its natural resources, and allowing the plundering to occur and hence the economic status the country experiences today. This

“The population stands at 6.1 million as of 2011, 52% of the population being female; and about 26.8% of the population within the age bracket of 10 and 24 years”

“... it is estimated that 70% of Sierra Leonean's live below the poverty line” Sierra Leone has a gross national income at \$881 per capita.”

“This poor economic status can be linked to the instability that the country has experienced in the past, and in particular the war that lasted from 1991 to 2002...”

has consequently left majority of the populace to lack the basics for their livelihood, amidst the many un resolved gruesome human rights abuses experienced.

The war affected women and men differently. A report of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (October 2004), showed that 44.9% of victims during the war are female. With the abduction, rape, sexual abuse and trafficking of girls and women being among the most abhorrent and distressing features of the eleven years of the armed conflict. The abuse left majority of women and girls survivors suffering from gender specific reproductive complications such as Vesico Vaginal Fistula (VVF), Recto Vaginal Fistula (RVF), incontinence and prolapsed uterus, among others. Many of those sexually abused ended up contracting HIV/AIDS, a condition that a joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates about 170,000 people between the ages of 15 and 49 living with the virus, of which 90,000 were female.³³ Slave labor, abduction, initiation in the rebel army, assault, and mutilation, amputation of limbs, separation of families, theft and destruction of property and death that affected both women and men caused severe trauma. Isis- WICCE's engagement with women of Sierra Leone through its international cross cultural training institute provides more evidence of women and girls continuing to experience similar violations, inequality in access to services and marginalization that hinder their participation in governance and thus, majority living undignified lives.³⁴

“44.9% of victims during the war are female... . Many of those sexually abused ended up contracting HIV/AIDS, a condition that a joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimates about 170,000 people between the ages of 15 and 49 living with the virus, of which 90,000 were female.”

33 Sylvia Augusta Goba. Domestic Violence in Sierra Leone; A case study,2005; Dora Dumbuya. Sexual Exploitation Against Commercial sex workers in Freetown, 2008

34 Musu Mai Mai, The women's movement in Sierra Leone and women's participation in Conflict resolution and peace building – A paper commissioned by Isis- WICCE, 2008

Women human rights and peace activists in Sierra Leone have been at the fore front to agitate for peace during and after the war. Their engagements have consistently lobbied for favorable changes in the governance systems. For example, women from Sierra Leone were part of the global women’s movement to engage the UN Security Council to institute an international instrument that would guide states to develop gender responsive post conflict reconstruction.³⁵ This is confirmed by Peter Penfold in his book “Atrocities, Diamonds and Diplomacy, 2012” when he recalls women such as Zainabu Bangura and Shirley Gbujama mobilizing other women to raise awareness for the need for women to engage in democratic processes. Specific issues they pushed for included: women flagging out the fast growing HIV epidemic; women establishing fora for information sharing and actions on issues of concern to them such as violence against women, increasing women’s participation in politics; engendering the manifestos of all political parties and reviewing the gender insensitive laws, among many other human security concerns.

4.2 UN Security Council Resolutions – Relevance to Sierra Leone

It is such realization and exposure of the inhumane acts against women in conflict settings that made the UN Security council, in October 2000, to unanimously pass a ground breaking resolution (UNSCR1325), that instituted guidelines for the first time in the history of the council, as a measure towards providing principles that guide gendered practices and accountability in conflict and post conflict setting. The council further enhanced the resolution with other resolutions; 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1996 to help address different impacts of war on women and girls, and their contribution to the peace and recovery planning. These resolutions refer to numerous previous regional and international commitments in its various articles. For example

35 UNECA. Women’s Role in conflict resolution and peace building in Africa; Strengthening mechanisms for accountability on sexual and gender based Violence- The case of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, A paper, 2012

article 9 of the resolution, call for the respect of rights of women and girls, and in particular in armed conflict situations; (article 10), enabling women to play central roles in prevention and resolving conflicts, and peace building; (article 1 to 8) guarantee their protection, all these fully upholding the international humanitarian and human rights laws. Article 11 calls for protection of the rights of women and the affected communities; and making sure that all actions specifically addresses the impact of war on women's lives. It further calls for their contribution to conflict resolution by adhering to gender mainstreaming in all aspects of life; the resolution enhances gender equality as a yard stick to maintain and promote peace and security internationally. Therefore, UNSCR1325 is one of the few international empowerment tools focusing on the reconstructing of countries affected by armed conflict.

Post conflict governments in Sierra Leone found the resolution instrumental to their post conflict reconstruction plans, and therefore ensured a sustainable political will and commitment in making the process gender responsive. In 2007/2008 extensive stakeholder consultations were held throughout the country, to collect the population's views in preparation for the adoption of the Nation Action Plan (NAP). In 2008, the National Action Plan was adopted with government prioritizing 5 pillars within UNSCR 1325 and 1820, frameworks that would guide government to roll out a plan which could take care of the gender concerns reflected by the population. These included the following:

- Prevention of conflict including violence against women and children (SGBV);
- Protection, empowerment of victims/vulnerable persons especially women and girls;
- Prosecute, punish perpetrators effectively and safeguard women and girls' human rights; to protection and rehabilitate survivors of SGBV and perpetrators;
- Participation of and representation of women;

- Promotion of the implementation process including resource mobilization, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting of the National Action Plan.

This report therefore, discusses government's efforts in implementation of NAP, as well as the extent at which the policies, laws and mechanisms instituted by government have effectively responded to the gender concerns of survivors of the war especially those sexually abused.

Having recognized the UNSCR1325 as central to its daunting work of reconstruction, participants reported government having taken a bold step in 2008 and developed the National Action Plan (NAP). Under the pillar of prevention of conflict and ending VAW, government recognized women's roles in ending violence. With the support from non-governmental organizations, government raised awareness on sexual and gender-based violence around the country. Law enforcement officers were trained on issues of sexual violence to equip them to effectively deal with the issues. Participants reported that government established support centres for sexually abused survivors in three of the major government hospitals, to provide medical and psychological assistance. The government exercised good will by providing a conducive environment for other stakeholders to respond to the post conflict needs of the populace. For example, Rainbo centres were established



Yasmin Jussu Sherrif hands over a message of peace to His Excellency Ernest Bai Koroma

by the IRC immediately after the war ended. The centres have been operating since then. There are plans to hand these centres over to the government. It was however noted that most of the rural poor survivors in remote districts could not and still cannot access these services due to lack of resources to transport them to urban centres, where the three hospitals that host the centres are located.

Some women human rights activists reported having utilized the government's good will to advocate for the reduction of maternal mortality rate that stood at 457 maternal deaths per 100,000 lives after the war. The advocacy eventually prompted government to announce free maternal healthcare programmes for pregnant women, nursing mothers and children under five in 2010. Women's advocacy had also contributed to government of Sierra Leone's decision in the immediate aftermath of the war to support and encourage girl child education through payment of school fees, subsidies, teaching and learning materials and the payment of examination fees. However, participants reported that the implementation of most of these commitments, especially in rural communities (where the magnitude of the problem is), is still a major problem.

Activists also reported their further engaging government in addressing the HIV pandemic. HIV/AIDS was recognized to have multiple challenges in the post conflict recovery and development in general. In response, government developed an HIV/AIDS Policy on Prevention and Control. It further approved over 300 agencies to engage in HIV/AIDS activities across the country.³⁶ Local networks were also set up to address issues at grass root level. Strategic documents on the HIV/AIDS response were also adopted to help guide the implementation although this lacked resources as shared by the participants.

36 Bi annual national Monitoring and Evaluation plan on HIV/AIDS February and June 2011, the national Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS 2011 to 2015, April 2011; newsletters on children with HIV/AIDS

4.3 Legal gender equality – windows of change

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender & Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) ensured relevant policy and legislative frameworks were put in place, to address the human security needs and dignity of the vulnerable groups, especially women and children. The national machinery and other government departments, as well as the civil society organizations developed policy documents which were adopted by government. These included; the National Gender Mainstreaming Policy 2000, the National Policy on the Advancement of Women, the Disability Policy and the Policy in the Aged and Anti-Human Trafficking Act 2005, the national gender strategic plan (2000) , the 3 'Gender Justice' Laws (2007) and the Sexual Offences Act (2012). Participants reported that the government with its partners made an effort through national and regional advocacy seminars to sensitize the population about individual rights with emphasis on promoting gender equality. However, there were logistical limitations in reaching the population in the far interior. Participants further alluded to the unaddressed psychological trauma that hindered some within the vicinity of the meetings from attending.

In 2002, the government further set up the Family Support Units (FSUs) within the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), attached to a number of police stations across the country. The units have the mandate to investigate all forms of domestic and gender based abuse including; child abuse, SGBV, commercial exploitation, internal and cross boarder trafficking. Participants reported that the units are also used to investigate allegations of marital and domestic violence and other forms of exploitation against women, and other vulnerable members in society like children and the elderly. In December 2003, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, and the Sierra Leone police to ensure the joint handling and investigation of sexual and gender-based violence complaints. This led

to the placement of trained social workers in all family support units (FSUs).³⁷ Participants confirmed that this initiative has made reasonable impact as there is an increase in women and children reporting SGBV cases.

In order for government to have a coordinated system of addressing SGBV it was reported that a National Committee on Gender-Based Violence which comprises of the SLP, government institutions, UN agencies, and international and national non-governmental organizations, was established, as a consortium that would coordinate the prevention and responses to gender-based violence. Whereas participants acknowledged progress, they noted that the approach fell short in ensuring the long term sustainability of the mechanism by not equipping the local personnel sufficiently to take over after international support exit. Participants were of the view that this has stalled the process.



MARWOPNET member engaging at a community dialogue



Community members at a human rights dialogue

Nevertheless, it was observed that the government political good has continued to provide the women peace advocates the opportunity to engage in the review of the laws that discriminated against women. In 2007, through collaboration between women's groups and the Parliamentary

37 Musu Mai Mai op. cit.

Human Rights Committee, three gender laws (the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorce Act, the Domestic Violence Act and the Devolution of Estate Act.) were enacted by the national legislature. The Domestic Violence Act which particularly concerns women as the most likely victims of domestic violence, provides for free medical examination, treatment and issue of a medical certificate to domestic violence victims to ensure that the matter is followed up by law enforcement officers. It also provides for safe houses for survivors of domestic violence. The enactment of the above laws and mechanisms it was observed, has resulted in survivors speaking out and hence the opportunity for the Protection, Empowerment of victims and the vulnerable persons especially women and girls; thus fulfilling part of the second call of Resolution 1325. However, the challenge of the limited numbers of survivors accessing available legal redress was mentioned once again.

4.4 Truth and Reparation – possibilities in process?

In addition to preventing and prosecuting the perpetrators of SGBV, participants affirmed that government has contributed to the promotion of rights and empowerment of women survivors by putting in place a reparation mechanism to rehabilitate survivors of SGBV. In 2008, the government established a reparation programme ranging from the provision of emergency healthcare for those injured during the war, but didn't get adequate medical attention to fistula surgery for women who were sexually abused and training for sustainable livelihood.

In order to protect and empower survivors of the violations committed during the war, the government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2002 by act 4 of 2000. Its main purpose was to address the aftermath of the violations committed against the population. The commission was mandated to look specifically at crimes against women and

girls during the war, thereby making it the first of its kind. It provided a forum for both victims and perpetrators to tell their stories in order for the commission to facilitate genuine reconciliation. The groups targeted included; amputees, sexual violence survivors and leaders from badly affected communities. Women activists and UNIFEM (the present UN Women), assisted the commission to recognize the gaps in the sensitization process which were causing survivors of sexual violence to shy away from accessing the commission, (which activists ascribed to stigma). It was observed that the gender machinery and UNIFEM both provided technical support to the commission to promote gender sensitivity during the data collection and hearing process that enabled more women to speak out and resulted in the final report of the commission providing a clear picture of the situation of the sexually abused survivors (TRC Report October 2004).

Furthermore, the national gender machinery put in place mechanisms across the country meant to enable survivors' access information about the reparation process. However, these strategies had short falls for survivors in more remote communities.

Important outcomes of the commission were recommendations for the short, medium and long term post conflict processes. Recommendations included; instituting laws to address discrimination against women as well as provision of services for psychological and reproductive health needs; repeal of discriminatory marriage, inheritance



Survivors in Tambaka still await the dividends of peace

and property ownership laws. It also called upon government to abolish the customary practice where women and girls survivors of rape were forced to marry their perpetrators.³⁸ All these recommendations were geared towards putting in place systems and procedures that are gender responsive, and would enhance respect of lives through the promotion of human rights and good governance. Some recommendations stated that UN agencies take part in making the general population aware of the TRC's recommendation so that survivors of the war are empowered to benefit from new policies and programmes that arose from the TRC.

In 2008, government received the UN Trust fund for the reparation process. The Government mandated NaCSA to implement the TRC recommendations on Reparations. The initial \$3 million disbursed from the UN Trust Fund was meant to set up the administrative machinery to manage the reparation process; however due to lack of information sharing by the NaCSA, beneficiaries understood that the funds were intended to respond to their plight. This information gap caused a lot of tension in people, and an outcry that the funds had been misappropriated. After instituting an administration process, the commission embarked on the data collection. Based on NaCSA's research (that included information up to 2003) a total of about 20,107 beneficiaries had been recorded. These included 1,063 amputees: 7,005 children: 16,500 psychological and 4,379 war wounded; a total of 4,744 war widows and 2,917 sexual abuse victims. In the next phase the NaCSA commenced implementation of the TRC recommended initiatives that included: screening of the sexually violated survivors; providing emergency medical assistance, including at least 235 fistula surgery; and 40

“Based on NaCSA’s research (that included information up to 2003) a total of about 20,107 beneficiaries had been recorded. These included 1,063 amputees: 7,005 children: 16,500 psychological and 4,379 war wounded; a total of 4,744 war widows and 2,917 sexual abuse victims.”

38 A white paper on the Report of the Truth and Reconciliation commission. June, 2005.

symbolic reparations. Participants observed that with the above processes in place more women were able to benefit from the TRC Reparation programme than from the DDR process, where far fewer female ex-combatants and women associated with the fighting forces accessed services. It was noted however, that there are still survivors that were not reached; many were left out due to late registration or non registration.

“Participants also gave an example of only 3,602 out of the 20,000 registered sexual violence survivors receiving the initial start up package that was just US\$100 each.”

It was also observed that government made minimal efforts to mobilize more resources locally to support survivors and depended only on the contributions of international donors. Participants also gave an example of only 3,602 out of the 20,000 registered sexual violence survivors receiving the initial start up package that was just US\$100 each. However, NaSCA recorded success and confidently indicated that more women than men (total to 60% of the whole total – men taking only 40%), benefited. Given that it was women civilians who suffered most of the identified violations, it was obvious that the percentage of female recipients should be higher than males.

Some of the successes shared by the NaCSA were; a survivor who got the \$500 as a package for resettlement; which is slightly above 2 million Leones. That survivor was able to use 250,000 Leones to purchase 120 bags of charcoal at 8,000 Leones per bag and profited 3,000 per bag. This enabled her to pay fees for her children. Another case was a man who used 350,000 Leones to farm cassava and vegetables. He was able to pay fees and even renovated his old house. The informant at NaCSA also reported that the collaboration with the faith based institutions facilitated the psychological therapy to the survivors. The Programme Manager, Mr. Amadu Bangura, indicated that the reparation programme was rated the best project in the post conflict recovery programmes in Sierra Leone, because he believed the survivors judiciously

used what they had to improve their livelihood. This is a perspective from just one region in Sierra Leone. There may be very different experiences in other areas where survivors did not benefit from these programmes.

4.5 The Special Court of Sierra Leone (SCSL) – Another Window for Women?

As a way of ending impunity for gross human rights violations, and another strategy to address the needs and concerns of female survivors of violence, the SCSL was established by an agreement between the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations, in January 2002, based on the UN Resolution 1325³⁹ that gives the Secretary General the mandate to negotiate with the governments that experienced armed conflict to create the Special court. Given the previous flaws of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda,⁴⁰ the Government of Sierra Leone and the UN decided to establish a court that would be lean and agile as well as inexpensive, that would sit in Sierra Leone, and prosecute only those most responsible for crimes perpetrated. It is important to note that the SCSL was a hybrid court that put an emphasis on addressing sexual violence and tried those who allegedly bore the greatest responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the war, but only after 30th November 1996.

It was reported that on June 20th 2007, the trial chamber heard of four counts relating to sexual violence. These constituted count 6 (rape), count 7 (sexual slavery and any other form

39 Section 8 (a) of the resolution specifically calls on member states to take into consideration the “Special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.” (See online version of resolution on http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf, accessed on 15 June 2013).

40 These flaws were perceived to have huge costs. They included; excessive length of the proceedings; remoteness from the territory where crimes had been committed, and consequently the limited impact of their judicial output on the national populations; and the unfocussed character of the prosecutorial targets.

of sexual violence), count 8 (other inhumane acts), count 9 (outrages upon personal dignity) respectively. The trial chamber found the three Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) officials criminally responsible for the following: acts of terror; collective punishments; unlawful killings; rape, physical violence (mutilation); outrages upon personal dignity (sexual slavery); recruitment and abuse of child soldiers; and enslavement and pillage.

Some research participants agreed that the Special Court established a precedent that distinguished between forced marriages in armed conflict, as a crime against humanity. The court argued in its ruling that “while the crime of forced marriage contains elements of sexual slavery, it has additional elements, a forced conjugal relationship between a man and a woman that by its exclusivity, demands loyalty to the captor to defy one’s captor is to risk punishment, including beating and death”. One of the participants concluded “this is now a codified violation of customary international law”.

Participants also mentioned that this was the first time ever that an International Court ruled on charges related to child soldiers or forced marriage, and the first time an International Court delivered a guilty verdict for the military conscription of children. Participants believed that this was a land mark decision, by which the SCSL has created a major legal precedent in International Criminal law.

Gloria Mbayo said, “The world will model after us....Sierra Leone is now part of the country that has sentenced people to life imprisonment for crimes against humanity such as rape and gender based violence”. While Edward Jombla said, “it will be very difficult for people to pick up arms in this country, with the fear that in future it will not only account for those who bear the greatest responsibility but may be those who actually gave the command”. This was shared by some of the survivors who believed that even though not everyone was tried and sentenced for atrocities committed against women, the fact that some leaders were convicted sent a strong

message that women should not be used as a weapon of war but their dignity must be respected. However, there were some voices from survivors who argued that the limitation of the mandate of the special court, to only commit those who bore the greatest responsibility could send wrong signals in weighing gross violations and this, with the perception, could lead to continuity of impunity among the low range fighters.

Nevertheless, there was a general belief that the sensitivity of the Special Court provided women survivors who accesses it the confidence to come out and testify. This was in addition to the extensive education of the masses on the existence and purpose of the court, making it possible for some communities to access information on gender based violence as a crime, which enabled many witnesses to come out and testify. The court having provided ample time to engage with the survivors was yet another best practice that psychologically prepared the survivors throughout the process. According to Jusu-Sheriff “Lest I forget one concrete legacy of the Special court is that the detention facilities now have a woman’s prison reducing overcrowding in the main Central Prisons at Pademba Road.”

The question about whether the government of Sierra Leone has done enough to combat gender-based violence was responded to positively by most of the participants interviewed. However, they argued that in spite of the achievements in several areas including the establishment of the family support unit, many ‘gender crimes’ were not treated seriously in the court courts of law. Light sentences were given to rapists, despite the enactment of the three ‘gender laws’. There were clear difficulties in enforcing this legislation such as the need for witnesses to corroborate the victim’s statement and the failure of most judicial officials to perceive rape as a serious crime. The sentence for rape is also dependent on the age of the victim and the classification of the crime as rape or unlawful carnal knowledge, leaving the law open to misinterpretation. Another limitation noted was that since the court relied on the law enforcement body of the state to

help enforce the law, the weak position of the state could not efficiently provide this support, as one participant concluded; “it was a kind of selective justice, that does not address adequately those who actually committed the crimes except the leaders and there were times, when those leaders were not actually at war front when those crimes were committed”... male participant.

While Christiana Gbondo of the IRC also adds, that, “the mandate was limited to those that bear the greatest responsibility in communities where we work; survivors of gender-based violence continue to see perpetrators around”.

Whereas the court succeeded in indicting 13 perpetrators, participants argued that the number was too minimal compared to the magnitude of the victims and the resources used, as shared by Saidu Ansumana who said, “those that amputated my two hands are around, I see them, I know them if I had a hand I would have known what to do by now”. The fact that many argued that the court should have persecuted more people suggests that the low number of accused does not justify the cost and that funds should have been allocated to address the human needs of the survivors. In addition the period of the conviction did not cover the entire period of the war which started from 1991-2002. This implies that atrocities before the 30th November 1996 were not accounted for as human rights activists put this to enhance unfairness in the provision of justice. To date, court processes are said to be slow and in most time people drop the case and continue living in pain and frustration (Peter Penfold, 2012).

The Special Court also experienced a number of challenges and setbacks. For example, it took long to secure the adequate funding. Unlike the two ad hoc tribunals, which were financed through the United Nations, the Special Court relied in principle on voluntary contributions from the International Community. Often donating states provided their contributions at the last minute, thus hampering financial planning and more generally created financial insecurity. This could have resulted in a variety of difficulties for the court.

4.6 Participation and representation of women in politics– lessons learnt?

In addition to some of the actions spearheaded by women as explained above, the focus groups of the women's activists interviewed shared their continuous efforts in lobbying government to include them in decision making processes. In June 2002 women were nominated to several decision making positions; some of these are the portfolios of the Ministers of Health and Sanitation, and Foreign Affairs. Through the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, female candidates aspiring for national leadership at Local Council and Parliamentary elections were supported in their election campaigns by building their skills in leadership. Participants said that such support increased women's ability to campaign for political elections that enabled 13% to make it to parliament; a higher number compared to the 1999 elections. Recent statistics from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (August 2007), showed that for the first time in the history of Sierra Leone, the High Court ruled that a woman's bid to become a paramount chief was lawful. The Country also had its first female Brigadier and a Chief Justice including the highest number of female judges in the history of the country



(totaling to 9 women out of 29 judges). From the CSOs, activists such as Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff were nominated to the Human rights commission, among others.

It was reported that women organizations have continued to complement government's efforts in making sure gender mainstreaming becomes a culture of all its development plans, thus excising the good will in enabling women to participate in the post conflict planning processes. The confidence government had in the women's movement enabled it to provide MARWOPNET the opportunity to take lead in the mapping and developing of the NAP for the UNSCR 1325. With the global activism and networking MARWOPNET had developed over the years, it was able to solicit the initial funding from CORDAID (a funding agency in the Netherlands). In partnership with WANEP, and the technical persons from the Ministry of Gender a plan was developed.

Nana Pratt proudly said, "MARWOPNET and NOW worked out of the box when government had no funding allocated to the development of the NAP, and using our non-confrontational approach we were able to convince government to give us the mandate...recognizing the power of expertise, we co-opted WANEP and the technical staff of the ministry to do the work....I believe it is the ideas of women that makes the Sierra Leone NAP tick...even to have a budget attached... it become easier for donors to support...."

In 2012, in collaboration with the Global Network of women Peace Builders (GNWP) based in New York, National Organisation for Women (NOW) and MARWOPNET trained local legislators on how to integrate NAP in their local plans of action as well as on monitoring the implementation of the NAP. "Women have not waited to be nominated but have lobbied to take key positions; for example development of the Agenda for Prosperity, where women have made sure there is a pillar on gender in order to making sure that resource mobilization for gender needs and concerns are taken care of" Nana Pratt.

Despite the progress made in ensuring women's rights, and including them in governance and decision making, women in Sierra Leone still face considerable challenges. As stated by MARWOPNET focus group discussion, "it is one thing to recognize the efforts of women but it is another to give due account in a practical way." The following reasons for the gap were aired out.

Patriarchy

Though an Action Plan has been formulated to operationalize the UNSCR 1325 the question of how successful its implementation and how committed its leaders and development partners have carried out the work is yet to be seen. As one participant said:

"The issue of fear to be hounded by patriarchy society among leaders both women and men was raised as a hindrance to the implementation of the commitment government has made".

An example shared is the case of Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, former Vice Chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, who during her tenure of office chaired a three person Human rights Complaints Investigation Tribunal. During her leadership, she took on a number of controversial matters. For example, the government was ordered to pay compensation to 'Chronically and Mentally Imbalanced' former soldiers who had been demobilized from the Sierra Leone army. The military authorities and Ministry of Defence had argued amongst other points that the donor funds provided for demobilizing soldiers at the end of the war were only to pay for the physically affected ex service (men)! and not for those psychologically or mentally affected by their participation in the fighting. The investigation tribunal headed by Jusu-Sheriff challenged this. In a ruling it was stated that the psychological wellbeing of Sierra

Leone soldiers who experience combat needs to be taken into consideration. The ruling stated that the same rights accorded to soldiers from the United Kingdom need to be applied to Sierra Leone. The tribunal's findings (in favour of the ex-military complainants) were not popular. It was later reported in the media as the reason why the tenure of Commissioner Jusu-Sheriff who chaired the tribunal and delivered the ruling was not renewed. Her fellow tribunal members were both re-appointed to the human rights commission when the official terms of all three expired on the same date. According to Jusu-Sheriff what was most important about the case is that the beneficiaries were reported having celebrated about the ruling singing "the human rights commission says we are also people".

One of the participants summarized such situation by saying:

"When considering the deeply enshrined cultural mentality of Sierra Leoneans and the history of conflict in the region, it is quite obvious that changing the culture to address violence, impunity and patriarchy has remained a big challenge" and another concluded that "patriarchy is still in our sub conscious minds and this brings some reservations to women leadership and therefore this is time to test our leadership, if it is sincere with promoting women's rights".

The MARWOPNET focus group also indicated that one of the reasons to justifying this is also the resistance of male folks to the term "gender," mentioning that men feel left out since their interpretation of gender is women. However, one male respondent intervened to say "politicians do not want women with independent mind..."

Low local capacity

Whereas there is evidence of some level of good will from the government to include women in decision making, the same government has taken very minimal steps to build the capacity of the women folks given the lack of opportunity for most of them to access exposure and training. For example, the ministry of gender (which is the national machinery with a key role of advising government on gender concerns as well as the central institution to coordinate the NAP) has been allocated inadequate funds. At the time of the recent data collection in February 2013, the team was told that the ministry's budget was less than \$500,000 per year.

In addition, there is still ignorance among some of the women in leadership about women's agenda and their role in advancing that agenda and women's leadership generally. When one of them was interviewed she was quoted having said "I do not want to deal with women's issuesit is not my business..". With such a statement, it was not surprising to learn that when government was apparently willing to consider women's call for 30% representation in parliament, the private members' bill was not put forward due to lack of concerted action by women's groups and female MPs. It was also reported that there was also a sense of indifference expressed by particular women leaders who had the opportunity to engage the president at the time to give his personal endorsement and support for the bill in the last few weeks of his first term in office.

It was also noted that MARWOPNET's effectiveness has weakened because it depends wholly on volunteers. Given the present economic hardships, every individual is looking for ways of earning a living. The organisation depends on the passion of the members to provide time and resources for it to work, a situation in which the organization cannot thrive or grow.

4.7 Planning of Post Conflict Recovery Interventions – Noting Gaps

It was also reported that there was a short turnaround time for many projects that were meant to reach villages in remote areas. This heightened tensions among survivors who up to the time of data collection had not received any intervention; for example out of 140 only 40 villages had received some interventions. People who were not reached express anger as they were not able to access services. These were mainly in rural settings such as Kamakwie and Makeni among others. Therefore it was noted that adequate time and planning is required to roll out any reparation for vulnerable communities. Even programmes such as disarmament and reintegration did not benefit many female ex-combatants. There was a deliberate focus on men because it was assumed that if they are not disarmed as they are more likely to take up arms again. This has accelerated female ex-combatants discontent and social exclusion, even among their own family members.

Activities undertaken to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS face numerous challenges. Translation of knowledge into behavioral change, eliminating the stigma and discriminating against people living with HIV/AIDS and promoting the human rights of people, specifically women and children living with the disease has proven difficult. Cultural practices that spread HIV/AIDS like female genital mutilation still persist. With the reduction and dependence on donor funds to tackle such gendered conditions, the decentralization of information about HIV/AIDS activities at district and chiefdom levels and the stabilization of the disease, there seem to be a reduction in focus on HIV/AIDS programmes.

4.8 Conclusion

Are the laws enough to transform lives?

It is also important to note that most peace and reconstruction plans have failed to put in place a concrete plan on how to address sexual and gender based violence and as such, the problem continues on even after the guns have gone silent. On the other hand even after the international bodies and states acknowledging the critical roles women have played before, during and after the armed conflicts, the marginalization of women's ideas and the decisions they make (which in some cases have led to end of armed conflict), is still evident in all post conflict actions in Sierra Leone. It is therefore fundamental that women in decision making positions not to only focus on political decision making but also agitate for the increase of the number of women in the mid ranks and among the technocrats, so that they can adequately plan for women responsive programs. The government of Sierra Leone needs to work harder to implement temporary affirmative action plan measures to ensure that the 30% quota of women in government and policy making positions are in line with Resolution 1325, the NAP and the Beijing Platform for Action.

4.9 Recommendations

Gender justice mechanisms and access to justice institutions need to be strengthened. According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report, the justice system itself militates against survivors of sexual violence taking their matters further. Justice officials have little or no understanding of the trauma associated with cases of sexual violence. The majority of rape cases that do make it to court have been followed through due to support from non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), who hear about the incident and encourage the victims to pursue legal action. Gender must be mainstreamed into all projects undertaken by government and must be provided appropriate budgets, and mechanisms must be set up to assess the impact of policies on the beneficiaries.

Remaining laws, rituals, practices and customs that discriminate against women and girls must be reviewed and addressed accordingly and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) must be domesticated into the Sierra Leonean law.

A national action plan must be made for the implementation of all gender laws that relate to women and the legal age of marriage to reduce on child marriages.

Increased funding must be allocated to the gender ministry, for the institution to reach out to all the interior of the country. This will alleviate the domination of the present post conflict recovery programme that seem to be urban centred ironically living the majority of the rural settings un attended to, where the most affected live. Cost specific gender programmes need to be funded by the national budget. There is also need for more resourced and widely accessible micro-facilities for women. There should be increased emphasis on women's material and social well being.

Adequate time and planning is required to roll out any reparation for vulnerable communities. There needs to be a deliberate focus on survivors of sexual violence, and female combatants who have been left out of the past conflict recovery processes.

There is need for more funds to support women's groups to understand and monitor political commitments to gender equality in all post-conflict reconstruction programmes. There is urgent

need to rejuvenate MARWOPNET that spearheaded the numerous initiatives that empowered the Sierra Leone women in leadership at national and international levels. This once strong network requires organizational support and rebuilding the capacity of its members for it to continue the nurturing of young women community based groups with a culture of voluntarism, team spirit and passion for agitating for gender equality and equity, by identifying the root causes of gender discrimination and respecting of the basic human rights of individuals and communities in general.

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**Isis-women's International Cross
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